

How to Prepare and Cook Food at Home

606 Great Food Preparation and Cooking Ideas

By Judith Brown

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Table of Contents

- [1. Meat and Poultry](#)
- [2. Fish and Seafood](#)
- [3. Fruit](#)
- [4. Vegetables](#)
- [5. Eggs, Cheese, and Other Dairy Products](#)
- [6. Salads](#)
- [7. Soups, Sauces, Gravies, and Stuffings](#)
- [8. Herbs and Seasonings](#)
- [9. Bread, Rolls, Cookies, and Cakes](#)
- [10. Pancakes, Waffles, Pies, and Dessert](#)
- [11. Beverages](#)
- [12. General Food Storage](#)
- [13. Home Preserving: Canning, Freezing, Drying](#)

1. Meat and Poultry

When purchasing meat, it will help your budget if you consider the price per serving, not the price per pound.

It is more economical to buy slab bacon and slice it as you need it. Slab bacon with the rind on is cheaper than sliced bacon, and it keeps better.

When you're making hamburger patties to freeze, make a nickel-size hole in the center of each patty. You won't have to thaw the hamburger before cooking, and the hole will close during cooking.

When wrapping chops, chicken parts, or hamburgers for your freezer, place sheets of waxed paper between the pieces of meat. That way the meat will separate easily and defrost faster.

It's best not to freeze cured, smoked, or canned ham, because freezing causes flavor and texture changes. Refrigerate this type of ham instead.

Dropping a few tomatoes in the pan will help tenderize a pot roast. Acid from the tomatoes helps break down the roast's stringy fibers.

When a recipe specifies thinly sliced meat, it will help to put the meat in the freezer for a short time before cutting it. Meat slices more easily if it's slightly frozen.

A mixture of olive oil and vinegar will tenderize meat. Rub the mixture on the meat and let it stand several hours before cooking.

Another way to tenderize meat is to rub baking soda into it, let it stand for several hours, and then wash and cook it.

Meats can be marinated in a plastic bag: Put the meat in the bag along with the marinade, seal the bag, and turn it a few times during the day.

If you've forgotten to thaw meat but want to cook it anyway, cook it half as long again as you would if it were thawed.

Meat will shrink less during roasting if it's cooked longer at a lower temperature.

Since a roast will thaw more quickly if all sides are exposed to air, elevate it on a cake cooling rack-or use the burner grill from your range. Put newspaper or a plate under the rack to catch the water and other drippings.

A shallow pan is better than a deep one for cooking a roast because it allows heat to circulate around the meat.

If you need to defrost frozen ground beef quickly, try sprinkling it with the amount of salt recommended for cooking (salt is a great thawing agent), or heat it in your dishwasher turned to its drying cycle.

A roast slices more easily if you let it stand for about 15 minutes after taking it from the oven.

To eliminate most of the smoke and grease when broiling fatty meats, pour a cup of water into the bottom portion of the broiler pan before putting it in the oven.

For pan drippings that have superb flavor, support poultry or meat on a grid of celery sticks and carrots rather than a metal roasting rack. Roast as usual.

To make relatively grease-free hamburgers in an electric frying pan, prop up one of the legs of the pan and then fry on the pan's elevated side.

The grease will drain down to the lower side of the pan. Be careful, especially if there are children around, that the pan cannot tip over or the contents spill out.

Want perfectly rounded, flat meat patties? Press down on a piece of meat with a cane and trim off the excess.

For particularly juicy burgers, put a table-spoon of cottage cheese in the center of each before frying or broiling.

If you're barbecuing hamburgers for a large group of people, you can save on grill time by partially cooking the burgers indoors.

Line the bottom of a baking pan with foil and lay down a layer of patties; set a piece of foil over this layer, and add another tier of patties. Repeat this procedure till you have 4 tiers. Place this oversized layer

cake in a 350°F oven for about 15 minutes; then finish grilling the patties outside. You can do the same thing with hot dogs, but cook them only a few minutes. Either way, you've solved the problem of too little grill space.

A meat loaf can be stretched with raw oatmeal, grated carrots, crushed corn flakes, or instant potato flakes.

If you want to keep your hands clean when mixing meat loaf, place the ingredients in a plastic bag and knead them through the bag. Still using the bag, shape the mixture into the form of a loaf, and gently ease it out of the bag and into a loaf pan.

Meat loaf won't stick to the bottom of the pan if you bake it on top of a few raw bacon slices. The bacon adds flavor, too.

You can cut the cooking time for meat loaf by cooking the mixture in muffin tins or in a flat, shallow pan.

So that meatballs won't fall apart when you cook them, chill them first.

An ice cream scoop is useful in shaping perfectly round meatballs. For smaller meatballs, use a melon scoop.

Do you like your steaks rare on the inside but well done on the outside? If so, grill them straight from the freezer without thawing.

When cooking red meats, it's time to turn the meat over to brown the other side when juices bubble to the surface of the meat.

Plan ahead to have steaks with that unmistakable "outdoor" taste even when the weather won't let you grill outside. Partially broil the steaks over charcoal and then store them in your freezer.

When it's raining, snowing, or cold outdoors, just finish broiling these steaks in your kitchen and they'll have that wonderful outdoor taste.

An unopened tin can can be used to pound flour into meat for Swiss steak-but wash the can first.

For particularly tender liver, soak it in milk and refrigerate it for 2 hours. Then dry the liver, sprinkle on breadcrumbs, and sauté.

Another tenderizer for liver: Soak it in tomato juice for 3 hours before frying or broiling.

If you partially freeze liver before slicing it, the skin will peel off easily.

To make breaded pork chops that are almost greaseless, bake them on a wire cake rack in a baking pan. Any grease will drip into the pan.

To tenderize pork chops or chicken pieces before barbecuing, boil them in a saucepan for 15 minutes, drain them, and then marinate them in barbecue sauce for half an hour. Then position them on the grill and barbecue as usual.

Bacon slices won't stick together if you roll the package into a tube held with a rubber band before refrigerating.

Bacon will curl less during frying if it has first been soaked in cold water.

If you want bacon strips to maintain their shape with minimum shrinkage, start frying them on a cold skillet and periodically prick them with a fork during cooking.

You won't have to clean a greasy frying pan every time you want bacon if you fry a large quantity and freeze it. Place the slices on cookie sheets so that they won't stick together, and when they're frozen, repackage them in plastic bags and store. Reheat foil-wrapped slices in the oven for just a few minutes.

Here's a way to impart additional tenderness and flavor to both meat and bun when barbecuing: Immediately after removing a hot dog or sausage from the grill put it in a bun and place

the bun in a plastic bag for 60 seconds, temporarily sealing the bag's open end by twisting it. Steam will form in the bag, imparting additional tenderness and flavor to both meat and bun.

Before opening a canned ham, run hot tap water over the container for several minutes. The gelatin will melt and the ham will slide right out.

Frying thin slices of ham for breakfast may be more economical than frying bacon.

Save time and effort when broiling sausages by putting the links on a skewer so you can turn them all with one movement.

If you chill a chicken for an hour after flouring it for frying, the coating will adhere better during cooking.

For guaranteed tenderness, marinate chicken breasts in buttermilk, cream, or ordinary milk for 3 hours in the refrigerator before baking.

Unpleasant poultry odors can usually be eliminated by washing the bird with lemon juice and rubbing it with salt.

You needn't slam away at a chicken with a knife in order to debone it. Kitchen shears make the job easier.

When frying, broiling, or grilling chicken, always use tongs to turn the pieces. If you use a fork you're likely to pierce the skin, and natural juices will escape.

If you want a fresh chicken to stay fresh longer, loosely wrap it with waxed paper (not plastic wrap) and refrigerate. Cook it within 3 days.

For pure white breast meat, defrost a chicken by letting it stand for a time in heavily salted cold water. The salt draws out all traces of blood. Rinse well with clean water before cooking.

A chicken will baste itself if you cover the bird with strips of bacon during roasting. Remove the bacon before the end of cooking to brown the bird further.

Chicken livers won't splatter during cooking if you first perforate them with a fork. Puncture several holes in each.

It's best to baste a chicken only during the final 30 minutes of cooking. Sauce won't penetrate during the early cooking stages and may cause the chicken to brown too quickly.

Don't risk having your hands and wrists splattered with hot fat when adding steaming water to a browning chicken. Use ice cubes and place the lid on the pan before they melt.

If you don't care for roast poultry dressing, you still can make the bird flavorsome and juicy by pouring a cup of water mixed with 1/4 cup of pineapple juice into the body cavity.

If you want a turkey to be extra juicy, use a basting needle to inject the raw bird with 1/4 pound of melted margarine in 6 to 8 places around the breast and thighs. Then roast according to your usual recipe.

For the most accurate thermometer reading of a roasting turkey, immerse the thermometer in warm water before sliding it into the turkey. When you insert it, keep it away from fat and bones, both of which render inaccurate readings.

To hold in stuffing, truss a turkey with un-waxed dental floss-it's extra strong and doesn't burn. Or, instead of trussing, use 2 heels of dampened bread to block the cavity and keep the

dressing in place. Position the crusts so that they face out and then overlap each other. One or 2 raw potatoes could also be used to seal the cavity.

[Go to Top](#)

2. Fish and Seafood

It's easy to make your own fish scaler. Nail 3 bottle caps, serrated edges up, side by side at the end of a piece of wood. To make scaling easier, rub the entire fish with vinegar to loosen the scales.

To tell whether a fish is fresh or stale check the eyes. If they're slightly protruding, bright, and clear, the fish is fresh. If they're pink, sunken, or cloudy, the fish is stale. If the gills are gray, the fish is stale; they should be red or pink.

One way to freeze fish is to put the fillets in clean milk cartons filled with water. When the ice that surrounded the fish thaws in the defrosting process, use the liquid to water your houseplants- it's ideal fertilizer.

Give frozen fish a fresh flavor by thawing it in milk. The milk eliminates the frozen taste.

You can make any Fish taste tender and sweet by soaking it in 1/2 cup of lemon juice and water, or vinegar, or wine before cooking.

To remove most of the salty taste from saltwater fish, soak it in vinegar and rinse under cold water before cooking.

If you like halibut as white as popcorn, add a little milk and lemon juice to the seasoned liquid in which you cook it.

After handling fish, you can rid your hands of the odor by rubbing them with salt or vinegar.

If you're having a hard time prying clams or oysters from their shells, soak them for a few minutes in club soda to loosen both muscles and shell hinges. Or wash them in cold water, place in

a plastic bag, and freeze for 30 minutes. Or plunge the plastic bag into boiling water for several minutes. Either freezing or boiling makes it easy to open the shells with a beer-can opener or knife.

If you can't get a fishy odor out of a pan used for frying fish, sprinkle the pan with salt, pour hot water in it, let it stand for a while, and then wash as usual.

Fish won't stick to the pan during baking if you lay it on a bed of parsley, celery, and chopped onions. This vegetable bed also adds flavor.

If you chill canned shrimp before adding them to hot mixtures they'll hold their shape better.

If you don't like the tinny taste of canned shrimp, soak it for 15 minutes in a mixture of 1 teaspoon of sherry and 2 tablespoons of vinegar.

If you've put too much mayonnaise in the tuna salad and you have no more tuna to add, substitute bread crumbs.

[Go to Top](#)

3. Fruit

Though their appearance might not be perfect, standard grades of fruits are as high in nutrition as the more expensive "fancy" grades.

Unless appearance is important, you can buy the cheaper grades and save money with no loss in food value.

Avoid buying prepackaged fruits and vegetables. The packaging may disguise rotten spots.

You can make your own fruit-ripening "bowl" from a perforated plastic bag. The perforations permit air movement, yet the bag will retain the fruit gases that hasten ripening.

To speed up the ripening of pears, tomatoes, or peaches, put them in a brown paper bag with a ripe apple. Punch some holes in the bag, and put it in a cool place out of direct sunlight. Or, put the

fruit in a box and cover it with a newspaper to seal in the natural gases that promote ripening.

To speed up the ripening of avocados, place them in a brown paper bag and store the bag in a warm place. Once ripe, you can retard spoilage by keeping them in the refrigerator.

You can judge if an avocado is ripe by sticking a toothpick in the stem end. If it slides in and out with ease, the avocado is ready to eat.

To keep an unused avocado half from turning dark, press the pit back into place before refrigerating the uneaten half.

For a perfect avocado half, cut the fruit in half lengthwise, pull the halves apart, and plunge a very sharp chef's knife into the pit. The pit will pull away cleanly with the knife. Remove the avocado halves from the shell with a spoon, or very gently with your fingers.

To hasten the ripening of green bananas, place them so that they touch overripe ones, or wrap them in a damp cloth and put them in a bag.

If you store ripe bananas in your refrigerator they won't go soft so quickly. The cold darkens their skins, but it doesn't affect the fruit. The best way to use up overripe bananas is to make banana bread.

When shopping for berries, examine the container bottoms. If they are wet or stained much of the fruit is probably moldy or mushy, so select only those containers that have dry bottoms. If you discover 1 or 2 bruised and spoiled berries when you get home discard them; molds quickly spread from berry to berry.

To keep berries in tip-top condition don't wash them until you're ready to eat them.

Strawberries will stay firm for several days if they are stored in a colander in the refrigerator.

The colander allows cold air to circulate through and around them, keeping them fresh.

Hull strawberries after you've washed them; if you do it beforehand they'll soak up water and turn mushy.

There's an old-fashioned "thumping test" for gauging a watermelon's ripeness. Whack your index finger against it. If you can hear a high plink, the melon isn't ripe. If you hear a low plunk, it is.

How can you tell when a melon is ripe? Hold it to your ear and shake it. It's ripe if you can hear the juice and seeds sloshing around.

When selecting oranges, don't be misled by the intensity of their color-most oranges are dyed to make them look more appetizing. Instead,

look for brown spots-surprisingly enough, they indicate top quality. And remember: The sweetest oranges have the biggest navel holes.

If oranges seem spongy, light in weight, or puffy, they won't be juicy.

To select the juiciest grapefruits, look for those with the thinnest skins. The "yellowness" of grapefruit skin doesn't indicate anything.

To get the juiciest, most flavorful lemons, pick those with smooth skins and small points at each end.

As soon as you bring lemons home from the store, put them in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed container of water. Doing so encourages them to yield more juice. (You can get the same result by immersing a lemon in hot water for about 15 minutes before squeezing it.) If you need only a drop or two of fresh lemon juice, you needn't cut into the whole lemon. Just puncture it and squeeze out the desired amount.

If you then store the lemon in the refrigerator, its freshness and flavor will be unaffected.

Save the liquids from canned fruits; add a little cornstarch to the juice to make an instant sauce for cake or pudding.

Juices saved from canned fruits can be combined with flavored or unflavored gelatin for a dessert or salad. If you don't want to use the juice at once, freeze it.

Fresh papayas will be soft when you squeeze them gently.

To keep dried fruit fresh for a longer period, keep it in the freezer.

Since carbon steel knives react with fruit and cause discoloration, cut your fruit with stainless steel knives.

To maintain the crispness of apple slices and to prevent them from browning, immerse them in salted water for 10 minutes before use.

When dicing several apples to make a large apple salad, mix them with dressing or mayonnaise as you chop. If you wait until you've cut all the apples, the first ones cut may discolor; coating them with mayonnaise will prevent this.

So that apples won't shrink when you bake them, remove a horizontal belt of peel from around the middle of each one. So that they won't wrinkle during baking, cut random slits in each one before placing them in the oven.

You can restore flavor to dried-out apples by slicing them into sections and sprinkling the sections with apple cider.

Frozen grapes make cooling warm weather snacks. They look attractive, too.

A quick way to remove seeds from grapes is to slice the grapes slightly off-center. This exposes the seeds and makes them easy to flick away.

If a fresh pineapple isn't as ripe as it could be, but you're eager to eat it, you can make it taste ripe this way: Prepare it as usual and then put the pieces in a pot, cover them with water, add sugar, and boil for a few minutes. Then drain off the water, let the fruit cool, and chill it in the refrigerator.

The center ring of a doughnut cutter is ideal for removing the core from slices of fresh pineapple. Just press the ring on each pineapple slice.

If a recipe calls for gelatin and pineapple, use either canned fruit or fresh pineapple that has been boiled for 5 minutes. There is an enzyme in fresh pineapple that will prevent gelatin from setting.

Taking a watermelon on a picnic? If you wrap it in dry newspaper or burlap as soon as you remove it from the refrigerator, it will stay refreshingly cool till you're ready to eat it.

To peel a difficult-to-skin fruit, hold it on a fork over a gas flame till the skin cracks, and then slide off the skin.

Another trick for peeling thick-skinned fruit: Put the fruit in a bowl, pour boiling water over it, wait 60 seconds, then remove the fruit and peel the skin with a paring knife.

To prevent freshly cut fruit from browning, place it in a bowl of cool water in which you've dissolved two powdered vitamin-C tablets; or keep the fruit submerged in water to which you've added juice from a half a lemon.

To avoid discoloration in fresh fruits you've sliced into, brush the exposed interior surfaces with lemon juice.

[Go to Top](#)

4. Vegetables

Sometimes produce that's a day or two old offers a better buy than higher priced fresh produce. If older produce merely has a few blemishes that you can cut away, and it's drastically reduced in price, go ahead and buy it.

Canned mushrooms cost more than fresh ones, so you'll save if you buy fresh ones- especially if they're on sale-and freeze them for future use: Fresh vegetables in season can be considerably cheaper than the same foods frozen or canned.

If you want to freshen blemished or wilted produce, snip off all brown edges, sprinkle the vegetables with cold water, wrap them in toweling, and place them in your refrigerator for an hour or more.

When slicing raw vegetables it sometimes helps to cut a small slice off one side to form a steady base.

If you're simmering vegetables and you need to add more water, use hot water, not cold. Adding cold water may toughen the vegetable fibers.

Economize on time and fuel by steaming 2 vegetables simultaneously in the same pot. If you want to serve them separately, loosely wrap each in aluminum foil during cooking.

To make frozen vegetables taste as much as possible like fresh ones, pour boiling water on them before cooking. This flushes away all traces of frozen water.

Cooking artichokes in iron or aluminum pots will turn the pots gray; use stainless steel or glass pots instead.

To keep artichokes from discoloring as you clean them, squeeze a lemon half into a bowl of cold water. As you clean each artichoke, rub it with the other half of the lemon, and then drop it into the acidulated water. Remember to cook the artichokes in a nonaluminum pan.

Fresh asparagus can be cooked to perfection in a coffee percolator. Position the asparagus upright and add an inch or two of water. The stalks will be cooked tender, while the tips will stay crisp.

To firm uncooked asparagus stalks that have gone limp, position them upright in a deep pot. Add ice water, and cover the pot with a plastic bag. Put the pot in the refrigerator for an hour, and when you're ready to cook the asparagus, the stalks will be firm.

You will avoid damaging the delicate tips of canned asparagus if you open the can from the bottom rather than the top.

If you've purchased asparagus with thick, tough stalks, peel the lower parts of the stalks with a potato peeler until you reach the soft interior.

Cook as usual and the stalks will taste as tender as the flowers.

To prevent beets from fading during cooking, leave an inch or two of stem attached and add a few tablespoons of vinegar to the water.

The pervasive smell of broccoli or cabbage while it's cooking can be reduced by dropping a slice of stale bread into the cooking water. Placing a cup of vinegar (which absorbs odors) on the range, or dropping a lemon wedge into the pot will also lessen the offensive odor.

You'll speed the cooking time for Brussels sprouts by marking an X with a knife on the bottom of each before putting it in the pot.

If you've purchased fresh broccoli, cabbage, or cauliflower, and find live insects in the vegetable, drive them out by soaking the food for 30 minutes in cold water to which you've added a few tablespoons of salt or vinegar.

Cabbage that has been frozen before cooking will not have the characteristic overpowering odor. (Wash the cabbage and dry it with a paper towel before putting it in a plastic bag and freezing it.) After defrosting, there will be no odor when the vegetable is boiled.

You can prevent red cabbage from turning purple during cooking by adding a tablespoon of vinegar to the cooking water.

The unappealing scent of cooking cauliflower will be reduced if you drop unshelled walnuts into the cooking water.

Add a dash of milk during cooking to keep cauliflower white.

Carrots can be skinned in seconds if they're first dropped into boiling hot water for 5 minutes and then plunged into cold water. The skins will slip right off.

Out of lettuce for bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwiches? Use celery-stalk leaves instead.

If you like to grill corn with the husks on, try it this way: First soak the cobs-husks and all-in water for 60 minutes. Then, fasten the ends with wire-twist ties so the husks won't slip off and place the corn on the grill. Turn it every 10 minutes for 40 minutes, remove it from the grill, peel off the husks, and serve.

For extra succulent corn on the cob, strip green leaves from the cobs and use the tenderest ones to line the bottom of the pot before adding water and cooking.

If your preference is corn off the cob, shave off kernels easily with a shoehorn.

A damp paper towel rubbed over corn on the cob easily removes the corn silk.

A dampened toothbrush is effective in brushing the last stubborn strands of corn silk from corn cobs.

One way to cover hot corn evenly with butter is to melt the butter and spread it on with a pastry brush.

To cut fresh mushrooms into uniform sections, try using an egg slicer.

When cleaning mushrooms, try just to brush them clean with your fingers, or rinse them off quickly. Soaking them will make them soggy.

To maintain the whiteness and firmness of mushrooms while sautéing them, add a teaspoon of lemon juice for every 1/4 pound of melted butter.

Your eyes will be less likely to water when you're slicing or chopping onions if you refrigerate the onions before cutting and slice off the root ends last. It also helps to breathe through your nose only and to run the exhaust fan.

You can peel fresh white onions quickly if you first immerse them in boiling water for a minute or two.

If you make an X at the root end of an onion with a sharp knife, the onion won't pop apart during cooking.

If you soak onion rings in cold water for an hour they'll be milder and more suitable for use in salads.

After you cut raw onions, get the onion scent off your hands by washing them with baking soda or salt.

If you're out of onions, packaged onion soup mix can be substituted in many recipes.

Why waste time laboriously shelling peas? Just drop the pods in boiling water. The pods will split open and release the peas, and the pods will float to the surface, where you can skim them off.

Peppers and tomatoes will keep their shape during baking if they are supported in greased muffin tins.

Peppers will stay bright green during baking if you coat them with salad oil or olive oil before stuffing and cooking them.

Exposure to air turns peeled potatoes dark, so if you want to peel potatoes ahead of time, cover them with water and refrigerate.

To firm raw potatoes that have gone soft, immerse them in ice water for 30 minutes.

To cook a baked potato in half the usual time, boil it for 5 minutes before putting it in a hot oven to get the "baked" flavor.

If you need to bake potatoes quickly, use baking nails. Insert a nail lengthwise in each potato; it will heat rapidly and then radiate heat to the inside of the potato, decreasing baking time by as much as 15 minutes.

You can bake potatoes in less time by slicing them in half lengthwise and cooking them on a lightly greased baking sheet, cut side down.

Do the skins crack when you bake potatoes? Keep them smooth by rubbing fat or butter all over the potatoes before putting them in the oven.

If you bake potatoes on top of a gas range you don't have to heat the whole oven. Wrap several medium-size potatoes, side by side, in aluminum foil, and place them on a burner set at the lowest

possible heat. In 15 minutes, flip the package over. The potatoes should be ready to eat in 30 minutes. Sprinkle a little flour on potatoes before frying them and they'll be extra crisp and crunchy.

Hash browns that are stuck to the bottom of a pan will lift right out if you nestle the pan in a larger one containing an inch or so of cold water. It will then be easy to loosen the potatoes with a spatula.

Some people say the very best French fries are made by frying them twice. Here's how: Let potato strips stand in cold water for an hour and wipe them off before an initial, short-duration frying. Drain off the grease; and fry them for the second time until they're golden brown.

You can use unpeeled potatoes when making hash browns. Just run them through the grater) skin and all, and you won't lose the nutrients that are just under the potato skin.

To keep potato pancakes from discoloring, add sour cream to the grated potatoes. Or grate the potatoes into a bowl of ice water; drain before use.

For extra nutrition, add powdered milk to mashed potatoes and beat well to mix.

Hungry for a new kind of nutritious snack? Cut potato skins into strips, season them to taste, and bake them in a hot oven until crisp.

The strong odor of sauerkraut can be eliminated by adding a few celery stalks to the juice.

You can also eliminate the smell of sauerkraut by adding red wine to it before cooking.

To test string beans for freshness, snap one in half. If it breaks easily, it's just right.

The quickest way to peel sweet potatoes is to boil them until just tender and then drop them into cold water. The skins will slip right off.

Looking for the ripest tomatoes in a batch? Put all your tomatoes in a large container filled with water. The ripe tomatoes will sink to the bottom, and the unripe ones will float.

You can peel several tomatoes simultaneously by putting them in a net onion or orange bag

and submerging them in a pot of boiling water for 1 minute. The skins will drop right off.

For firm tomato slices, cut parallel to the stem axis.

To heighten the flavor when cooking tomatoes, add a pinch of sugar to the cooking water.

[Go to Top](#)

5. Eggs, Cheese, and Other Dairy Products

Medium or large eggs should be used in recipes calling for eggs; using small or extra-large eggs may create a slight imbalance in the ingredients.

You can freeze egg whites for up to a year, but after you defrost them remember that 2 table-spoons of egg white that's been frozen equal 1 tablespoon of fresh egg white.

Before adding eggs to a yeast mixture, bring them to room temperature. Cold eggs slow down the yeast's action.

You don't need an eggbeater to beat eggs. Simply break the eggs into a jar, screw the lid on tightly, and shake the jar vigorously.

You can store egg yolks for up to 3 days by covering them with water in a covered container in the refrigerator.

You can tell whether an egg is fresh or not by putting it in a pan of cool salted water. If the egg sinks to the bottom, it's fresh. If it rises to the surface it's not.

Raw eggs won't slip from your fingers if you moisten your fingertips before picking up the eggs.

Egg yolks won't curdle when poured into a hot mixture if you first add some of the mixture to the yolks to raise their temperature.

Give stability and body to beaten egg whites by adding' 1/4 teaspoon of cream of tartar for every two whites,

For maximum volume, let egg whites warm to room temperature before beating and add just under 1 tablespoon of water for each egg white.

Remember that egg whites won't beat properly if any trace of yolk remains. Flecks of yolk can be removed with the moistened tip of a cotton swab.

If an egg cracks when you boil it, add a little vinegar to the water. The vinegar will prevent the white from streaming out of the shell.

If you want to keep yolks perfectly centered in hard-boiled eggs (perhaps for deviled eggs) stir the water constantly while cooking.

Hard-boiled eggs will be easier to shell if you submerge them in cold water for a minute or so after cooking. Then, when you crack the egg's shell, gently roll the egg between the palms of your hands. The shell should slip right off.

To prevent an egg from cracking when placed in boiling water, pierce it with a sharp needle.

The shell of a hard-boiled egg will slide right off if you crack it against the side of your sink several times and then peel it under cold running water.

When slicing hard-boiled eggs, the yolk will not crumble if you first dip your knife or egg slicer in cold water.

You'll be able to tell the raw eggs from the hard-boiled ones stored in your refrigerator if you hard-boil eggs in water to which you've added food coloring. Or mark hard-boiled eggs with a pencil or crayon before you put them away.

If you haven't marked them, the quickest way to distinguish hard-boiled eggs from uncooked ones is to spin them. A hard-boiled egg will spin; a raw one won't.

If you need a boiled egg and the last egg in the carton cracks, don't despair. Just boil the egg in a "shell" fashioned from aluminum foil.

If you want an omelet to be extra tender, add a little water to the beaten egg mixture instead of milk or cream. Water slows down yolk coagulation; milk or cream accelerates it.

If you rub salt on your omelet pan with paper toweling both before and after cooking, you'll make your own nonstick finish.

When you're preparing to make several omelets, you can still beat all the eggs together if you remember this handy measuring rule: Two large eggs equal 1/3 cup beaten eggs.

For extra fluffy omelets add a little cornstarch before beating the eggs.

A few drops of vinegar in the cooking water will keep a poached egg from running.

If you make poached eggs and can't serve them right away, don't discard them. Simply place them in cool water. Later, when you're ready to serve, you can reheat them slowly in hot salted water; the flavor will be unimpaired.

For added flavor, poach eggs in white wine, beer, milk, cream, meat or vegetable stock, tea, or vegetable juice instead of water.

To store boiled and poached eggs dishes made a day in advance, cover the eggs with a sauce or aspic, and then refrigerate. Bake or broil the eggs the next day to serve them hot.

The secret of superb scrambled eggs is to cook the eggs slowly, starting with a cool-not heated-buttered pan. When their texture is almost perfect, mix in 1 tablespoon of evaporated milk or cream per portion. (If you're serving a large group, extend the mixture by stirring in a white sauce.)

If you want a soufflé that's so light it practically floats, make a collar with aluminum foil, waxed paper, or brown paper. After buttering it thoroughly, wrap it to a height of 5 inches around a soufflé mold, fasten it with twine, and pour the soufflé mixture into this container. Remove the collar before serving.

If you want to stretch scrambled eggs, just add water and a little baking powder. The taste won't be affected and the eggs will be fluffier.

Mold won't form on cheese if you store it with a few sugar cubes in a tightly covered container.

If cheese does get moldy, cut or scrape the mold off and then dab the exposed surfaces with vinegar, which retards mold growth.

Cheese will have added freshness and flavor if it's wrapped in a cloth soaked in wine and vinegar and then stored in the refrigerator.

Store cottage cheese upside down in the refrigerator to keep it fresh longer.

If you don't have a cheese slicer, you can cut cheese easily with extra-strength thread held taut.

When cheese gets too hard, you can soften it by soaking it in buttermilk. To prevent cheese from drying out and hardening, apply butter to the cut end, or wrap tightly in aluminum foil.

It's easier to grate Cheddar or any soft cheese if you chill it in the freezer for a few minutes before grating.

You can make thinner, neater slices of processed cheese if you dip your knife in hot water before cutting.

If you like to use cheese strips in salads and as garnish, try cutting strips with a potato peeler.

Frozen cream cheese that appears grainy after defrosting can be whipped smooth again.

Dairy products that have almost reached expiration date sometimes offer good values with little compromise in quality. Ask your store manager about such "unadvertised specials."

If you're going to store unsalted butter in your freezer for a long time, wrap it carefully and seal it airtight. Salted butter that you're freezing for a short time can be stored in its original container.

Always store butter in the butter keeper or on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator; otherwise it will absorb flavors from other foods.

Ice cream that's been opened and put back in the freezer may develop a warlike film on its exposed surface. A film won't form if you press a piece of waxed paper against the exposed surface before resealing the carton.

It's safe to store milk in the freezer, but be sure to defrost it in the refrigerator, not at room temperature.

[Go to Top](#)

6. Salads

You can make soggy lettuce crisp and firm again by submerging it in a bowl of cold water and lemon juice in the refrigerator. After an hour, remove the lettuce from the refrigerator and dip it briefly in hot water, then in ice water to which you've added a dash of apple cider vinegar. Pat the lettuce dry with a paper towel.

Another way to make lettuce (or celery) crisp is to place it in a pan of cold water to which you've added slices of raw potato.

If you want to remove the core from a head of lettuce without causing the brown spots that form when you cut out the core with a knife, just smack the core end against the countertop. The core can be twisted right out and the leaves will stay unblemished.

If you put washed salad greens in the freezer about 10 minutes before preparing the salad they will be even crunchier.

You can prepare a salad up to 6 hours ahead of time if you place the vinaigrette dressing in the bottom of the bowl and carefully place well dried salad greens on top. Cover and refrigerate, but don't toss until just before serving.

To make scalloped edges on the cucumber rounds you use in salads, simply run fork tines over a peeled cucumber, then slice as usual.

For a more elegant presentation, remove the seeds from cucumbers before serving them in a salad or as a vegetable side dish. Cut the peeled or unpeeled cucumber in half lengthwise; remove the seeds with a melon bailer or a small spoon.

For extra-crisp cucumber slices, soak them in salted ice water for 30 minutes. Just before serving, drain and rinse well under cold running water. Pat dry and toss with dressing.

Be sure that lettuce leaves are well dried before tossing or the salad dressing won't cling.

When dressing a salad with vinegar and oil, remember to pour the vinegar first. If you pour the oil first, the vinegar won't stick to the greens.

Don't pour vinaigrette dressing over salad greens until the moment before serving. Only shredded cabbage or tomatoes can stand a vinaigrette bath for up to an hour before serving without losing firmness.

Don't toss sliced tomatoes into your salad. Their water content will dilute the salad dressing. Add them on top at the last minute, or use whole cherry tomatoes that aren't cut.

A soggy salad never garners compliments for the chef. You can keep your salads crisp if you invert a saucer in the bottom of the bowl to allow any liquid to drain and collect under the saucer, away from the greens.

A sticky wooden bowl will look and feel smoother if it's washed and dried and then vigorously rubbed, inside and out, with waxed paper.

For instantly cold, well-blended oil and vinegar salad dressing, pour the dressing into a screw-top jar, add an ice cube, and shake. Remove the ice cube before pouring the dressing. Here's another twist: Place your greens in a plastic bag, add the dressing, and shake the entire mixture. The greens will be evenly coated on all sides.

If you wanted crumbled Roquefort or blue cheese for your salads, freeze it; then it will crumble easily when scraped with a paring knife. (This does not work well with other cheeses.)

For extra-creamy salad dressings, place dressing ingredients in a slow-running blender and slowly add the oil.

If salt is used as a salad seasoning, it's best to add it at the last minute. If you add the salt ahead of time the lettuce will wilt.

A crushed garlic clove rubbed on the inside of a salad bowl will heighten the taste of the salad ingredients.

To keep fruit salad, potato salad, or shrimp as cold as possible for serving, place it in a bowl and put that bowl in a larger one filled to the rim with crushed ice. If you want to make the ice even colder, add coarse kitchen salt to it.

[Go to Top](#)

7. Soups, Sauces, Gravies, and Stuffings

If you want rich, brown beef stock, add beef bones that have been browned in the broiler (about 6 inches from the heating unit). Your homemade soup will be free of

fat if you make it ahead of time and then store it in the refrigerator until the fat solidifies and rises to the top of the container, where it's easy to remove.

If fatty soups and stews aren't your dish, render them fat-free by stirring either lettuce leaves or ice cubes into the pot (don't allow the cubes to melt). Fat clings to both substances, which then can be discarded.

Worried about scorching and boil-overs when cooking soup in a large stock pot? You needn't be. Position 2 or 3 bricks around the burner so that the pot is elevated above the heating coils or the gas flames. Then simmer the contents as long as necessary over low heat.

If you want a soup to have more body, add bones to the pot; marrow bones and veal bones are especially good. They contribute gelatin, which is a thickening agent.

To maximize flavor when making soup, start heating bones and meat in cold, salted water, instead of dropping them into boiling water.

If the stew or soup you're preparing seems too salty, add sugar or a few slices of raw potato. (Discard the potato slices before serving.)

Soup too thin? Add mashed potatoes or instant rice, stirring until you get the desired consistency.

When saving meat juices for stock, leave the fat in place on the surface. When it solidifies, it'll seal the stock and its flavor as if it were paraffin.

If you want to clear a broth, add a few eggshells to the stock, and simmer it for 10 minutes. The eggshells will attract the "sediment."

When cutting chickens into pieces, save the carcasses, necks, and gizzards. Freeze them, along with roast turkey and chicken carcasses; when you have enough, use the carcasses to make delicious chicken stock.

It's easy to make a concentrated stock that will add a chef's touch to your soups. Reduce brown beef or chicken stock to a heavy, syrup-like consistency, being careful not to burn the stock.

Store it in the refrigerator or freezer and just break or cut off small pieces as needed to flavor soups or sauces.

Here's how to clarify stock and make aspic in one step: For every quart of stock, sprinkle 2 envelopes of unflavored gelatin into a cup of cold water. Set aside to soften. Beat 2 egg whites to a froth; crush the shells into the stock in a saucepan; add the egg whites and the softened gelatin to the pan. Over high heat! stir until the mixture boils.

Then turn off the heat and let the mixture sit for 10 minutes. Strain it through a fine sieve lined with a wrung-out kitchen towel. Allow the stock to drip through the sieve without disturbing it. Use the aspic as directed in your recipe.

To save money! trim beef and veal roasts yourself. Store the bones in a heavy bag in the freezer! and use them to make beef stock.

When making stock never allow the liquid to boil. Boiling will make the stock cloudy.

There's no need to thaw frozen stock before using. Just pop a frozen block of stock into a covered saucepan and heat it gently until boiling.

If freezer space is tight and you want to store homemade stocks! simply cook down the stock until it's reduced by half; then freeze it. To use! you can restore the stock to its original volume by adding water.

To avoid having all your plastic containers filled with frozen stock! line each container with a heavy-duty freezer bag and fill it with stock. Cover and freeze. Slide the bag with the frozen stock from the plastic container. Seal the bag with tape or a twist tie! and return it to the freezer.

For tastier clam chowder! add the minced clams at the last moment and cook just long enough to heat. As a bonus! the clams won't become mushy.

To keep milk from curdling when you prepare tomato soup! add the soup stock to the milk instead of the milk to the stock.

The vitamin-rich water used for cooking vegetables can be frozen and used later for making a soup base.

Roast! steak! and chicken bones enhance the flavor of any soup stock! so freeze them for future use instead of throwing them away.

Pureed leftover vegetables lend additional flavoring to soup stocks. If soup isn't on the menu! freeze the puree in ice cube trays and use the vegetable "cubes" later as needed.

Your brown sauce won't thicken if you add acids, such as citrus juice or vinegar, before the sauce has been reduced.

If your brown sauce is too thick! you can thin it with more meat stock or a tablespoon or two of light cream.

Don't cover meat sauces while keeping them warm. Moisture will build up and will dilute your sauce.

Substitute beef; veal, or pork fat for butter when making a brown sauce for gravies.

To give your sauce an extra-shiny appearance! whip in 2 tablespoons of cold butter just before serving.

If a sauce begins to separate, add a little cold water. If the sauce begins to cool too quickly, alternate cold and hot water.

One way of making rich brown gravy for your roast is to put flour in a pie pan and let it brown in the oven along with the roast. When the meat is done, mix the toasty brown flour with a little cold water and heat it with the meat juice.

To skim fat from stock, add a tablespoon of cold water while the stock is simmering, and discard the film that rises to the surface.

You can freeze leftover hollandaise sauce in boilable plastic bags. Thaw as needed by running warm water over the bag.

If you make béarnaise sauce several hours ahead of time, keep it in a tightly closed, preheated vacuum bottle.

If gravy's too salty, add several pinches of brown sugar. It'll remove the salty taste without sweetening.

Does your gravy taste burned? It won't if you stir in a teaspoon of peanut butter.

There are two quick ways to darken gravy. The first is to mix a tablespoon of water with a tablespoon of sugar, heating the blend in a pan until the sugar browns and the water evaporates.

Pour the gravy into this pan. The second method is to add coffee to the gravy; it will add color without affecting the flavor.

If you want greaseless gravy, let the pan drippings sit for a few minutes. The grease will rise to the top where it can be skimmed off, leaving stock for grease-free gravy.

If an egg-based sauce curdles, it's probably because it's been boiled. Keep the temperature moderate when making egg sauces.

A beurre menie makes a useful sauce thickener. For every tablespoon of softened butter, mix in 1 tablespoon of all-purpose flour. The beurre msnie can be formed into small balls and stored well covered in the refrigerator for several weeks.

To thicken a sauce, just break off part of a ball and whisk it into the sauce just before serving. Continue adding pieces of beurre msnie until the sauce is the desired consistency.

If you don't have a bowl large enough to hold the turkey dressing you're mixing, try using a large plastic bag.

Here's a quick way to stuff a small turkey: Sprinkle several bread slices with herbs and chopped onion, fold them in half and push them into the cavity.

You'll be able to remove the dressing from a turkey easily if it's held in a cheesecloth bag that you've pushed into the cavity. When you're ready to serve, pull out the bag and turn the dressing into a bowl.

Here's how to prepare fresh chestnuts for a stuffing: With a small, sharp knife, slit the flat side of each chestnut; put the nuts in a saucepan; cover them with cold water; and bring to a boil. Cook for

several minutes, then remove the pan from the heat. Working quickly with only a few nuts at a time, peel the outer and inner shells. Cook the peeled nuts in a saucepan covered with water or stock. Simmer until tender (about 30 minutes).

[Go to Top](#)

8. Herbs and Seasonings

Garlic puree makes an excellent condiment to have on hand for flavoring meats, vegetables, and salad dressings. Wrap at least 10 whole garlic heads in aluminum foil and bake in a 375°F oven for 1 hour. Separate the cloves, and squeeze each one gently to release the garlic from the skins. Pass the garlic through a fine sieve. Mix with 1 table-spoon of olive oil for each 10 heads. Season with salt to taste. Store in a jar and cover with a thin layer of olive oil. Remove small amounts as needed. The puree will keep in the refrigerator for several months.

Freshly made chili powder has more kick than the store-bought kind. Buy dried chilies in a Spanish or Mexican grocery store. Remove the seeds and stems, then grind the chili pods in a blender or in a food processor with a steel blade.

For maximum flavor, buy whole spices and crush or grind them with a mortar and pestle or an electric spice grinder just before using.

To save money and enjoy fresher flavor, make gourmet mustards and vinegars at home.

For mustards: Add freshly ground or cracked spices or fresh, chopped herb leaves to Dijon mustard. Flavor to taste. Store in the refrigerator.

For herb vinegars: Heat 1 quart of white wine vinegar with 1 cup of minced fresh herbs (or 1/4 cup dried herbs) in a nonaluminum saucepan. Steep at room temperature overnight, then strain through a fine sieve lined with cheesecloth. Store in airtight glass bottles.

Grated citrus fruit rinds make wonderful flavorings for cakes. Store them in a covered jar in the refrigerator until needed.

A piece of dried or fresh lemon or orange peel makes a tasty, unusual addition to a bouquet garnish for meat or chicken stews.

The best salt is sea salt or coarse kosher salt.

Iodized salt can add an unpleasant, harsh taste to foods.

In selecting bay leaves, look for leaves that are imported-preferably Turkish. Many cooks consider that they have better flavor than the California bay leaf, which tends to be stronger and oilier.

For uniform texture in chopped chives, cut the chives at the root end of the plant and bunch them together tightly with one hand. Hold the bunch on a cutting board and chop finely with a sharp knife.

Any dish that's prepared to be served cold should be slightly over seasoned, because chilling subdues flavors.

If you're preparing a slow-cooking dish, it's preferable to use whole spices rather than minced spices. Whole spices impart their flavor gradually, matching the pace of the cooking process.

You can boost the flavor oils in fresh or dried herbs by kneading the herbs between your finger-tips to release the oil bouquet.

If a recipe specifies dried herbs and you have only fresh, triple the amount called for.

If you put teaspoon of whole peppers in your pepper shaker, the pepper will pour better and taste snappier, too.

Using minced parsley (dried or fresh) with other herbs enhances their tastes.

The skins will slip right off garlic cloves after they are soaked in warm water.

Herb butters are convenient garnishes for broiled meats, poached fish, or steamed vegetables. For every 1/2 pound of softened butter, mix in the juice of 1/2 lemon or lime, 2 tablespoons of fresh, chopped herbs, and salt and pepper to taste.

Put the butter on a length of waxed paper and roll it all into a tube. The tube can be frozen or refrigerated.

It's easy to make garlic salt: Sprinkle table salt on a board and cut garlic on it. After the salt absorbs all the garlic juice, store it for future use.

Similarly, onion salt can be made by squeezing onion juice over table salt.

Seasoned salt is much cheaper to make than to buy. Blend iodized table salt with garlic powder, pepper, paprika, dry mustard, thyme, sesame seeds, and anything else you like. Put the seasoned salt in a shaker and let it stand for a few days to blend the flavors. Use it on salads, vegetables, soups, and casseroles. You can maintain the freshness and flavor of herbs by soaking them in olive oil and refrigerating them.

You can chop parsley or chives with a grater if you keep both seasonings in your freezer. When you want a small amount of either, remove it from the freezer, grate as much as you need, and put the remainder back "on ice."

Parsley will be easier to chop if you rinse it and refrigerate in a sealed plastic bag or other container until crisp.

Because fresh basil leaves discolor easily, always use a stainless steel or carbon and stainless steel knife to cut them. Lay the leaves one on top of the other and roll them into a tight tube. Slice thinly with a sharp knife, then unravel the leaves.

This is called a chiffonade cut. Since chili powder, paprika, and red pepper deteriorate under humid and hot conditions, store them in dark containers in your refrigerator during the summer.

Since rosemary can be hard and tough, even after cooking, grind it in a pepper mill before use.

Italian or flat leaf parsley has much more flavor than curly parsley, which is best used as a garnish or in recipes requiring little or no cooking.

Add the stems to a bouquet garnish for flavoring long-cooking dishes, such as soups or stews.

You can make your own celery powder- which makes a good flavoring for stews, soups, and salad dressings-by drying celery leaves and then forcing them through a sieve.

9. *Cereals, Rice, and Pasta*

If you like rice that's snowy white, add some lemon juice to the cooking water.

If the rice you're cooking has burned slightly, you can remove the burned flavor by adding a heel from a loaf of fresh white bread and covering the pot for a few minutes.

When cooking dry beans, a little baking soda will keep them from getting mushy.

When cooking potatoes or rice, add a pinch of rosemary to the water instead of salt; it adds a special flavor.

You can make chocolate flavored oatmeal- without buying the more expensive packaged kind-by adding cocoa mix to regular oatmeal as you cook it. Mix in enough cocoa to please your taste.

If your hot cereal has lumps in it, next time make sure the water is boiling before adding the cereal a little at a time.

When buying pasta, make sure it's made from semolina rather than ordinary flour. Pasta made from semolina holds its shape better and doesn't become mushy.

A large strainer or a French fry basket can make it easy to drain pasta. Sit either device inside the cooking pot before you add the pasta; after cooking you can simply lift the pasta from the pot.

When boiling water for spaghetti or macaroni, add a teaspoon or so of cooking oil. Then the pasta won't stick together (or to the pot), and you needn't stir it constantly.

For perfect al dente pasta every time, use the old Italian method of testing for doneness. Remove a strand of pasta from the boiling water and throw it against the wall or refrigerator. If it sticks, the pasta is cooked al dente and should be drained and served right away.

Homemade egg pastas can be rolled, cut, and partially dried (until still pliable but not sticky), then laid on cloth or heavy paper dusted with semolina flour or cornmeal. Cover the pasta with another towel and store in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours. When cooked, the pasta will have the same flavor as freshly made.

There are several ways to prevent the pot boiling over when cooking pasta. You can lay a large metal spatula across the top of the pot; or rub shortening around the rim before cooking; or add several teaspoons of cooking oil or a dab of butter to the cooking water.

For superior pasta, let salted water come to a boil, stir the pasta into the water, cover the pot, and turn off the heat. After the pasta sits for 15 minutes it will be ready to eat.

To prevent cooked spaghetti strands from becoming sticky, run fresh, hot water into the spaghetti pot before draining.

If you've made a pot of spaghetti but can't serve it at once, leave it in water, but make it cool enough to stop the cooking process. To reheat the spaghetti, put it in a strainer and shake it thoroughly as you run it under hot tap water.

If you're going to use pasta in a dish that requires further cooking, reduce the pasta cooking time by one-third.

It is possible to remove ravioli from a can without damaging the "pillows." Open the can; place it in a pan, open-end down; puncture the other end of the can with a can opener, and lift the can straight off the ravioli. Every pillow will be intact.

Hang homemade pasta over a clothes hanger to dry.

You can cut a thin-crust pizza more easily with kitchen scissors than with a knife.

[Go to Top](#)

9. Bread, Rolls, Cookies, and Cakes

To make yeast bread more moist, use water in which you've boiled potatoes. As a bonus, the bread will be slightly larger; it will stay fresh longer, too.

If you find it hard to knead rye, whole wheat, or pumpernickel dough, rub a little oil on your hands. The oil makes the dough more pliable.

So dough won't form a crust while rising in a bowl, first grease the bowl and press the dough into it. Then, turn over the dough, greased side up, and cover it lightly with a dish towel.

A nonstick cookie sheet is ideal for kneading and shaping bread dough; you won't have to cope with the powdery mess left by a pastry board or cloth.

To check whether bread dough has risen sufficiently, press 2 fingertips into the dough; if a dent remains, the dough is ready for the oven.

To make bread extra crusty, brush the dough with an egg white beaten with a tablespoon of water.

Dough rises best in a warm spot. Try putting the dough bowl on a heating pad set at medium, or on a table in front of a sunny window. Another good place is inside a gas oven where the warmth of the pilot light encourages dough to rise. Or, let your television set do double duty if you're making bread while watching your favorite TV show. Let the dough rise on top of the set, where heat from the picture tube will warm it. Allow a few extra minutes of baking time to brown bread crust that has been baked in a shiny metal pan.

If your bread crust gets too hard while you're baking the loaves, next time place a small pan of water in the oven. Also, when the bread has just been taken from the oven, spread soft butter on the warm crust.

Home-baked bread can be cut neatly into equal slices if you cool the bread on a wire rack and then use the slight impressions left by the wires as your guide.

For round-shaped homemade bread, bake your dough in 2-pound coffee tins-or try a frying pan with a non-metal or detachable handle.

If you allow bread to cool in the baking pan, its bottom and sides will get soggy. Cool bread on a rack instead.

When making muffins, you can prevent burning by filling one of the pan's cups with water rather than batter.

If you want your rolls to have a crystalline glaze, brush them with a mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of milk and 1 tablespoon of sugar before sliding them into the oven. Or brush the dough with a mixture of 1 tablespoon of milk and a beaten egg.

To keep dinner rolls piping hot in a straw serving basket, place them on a napkin-covered hot ceramic tile on a trivet. You can heat the tile in the oven at the same time you're heating the rolls.

If you've made and buttered slices of toast and your youngsters are slow in showing up for breakfast, keep the slices warm by wrapping them in aluminum foil.

Leftover rolls that have~ become wrinkly can be made smooth again by placing them for a few minutes in a 350°F oven.

If you need to thaw a loaf of frozen unsliced bread in a hurry, put it in a brown paper bag in a 325°F oven for about 5 minutes.

Rolls will stay hot longer in a serving basket if you spread aluminum foil under the napkin they're wrapped in.

If leftover rolls have hardened, make them as soft as fresh again by sprinkling them lightly with water, covering them with foil, and heating them in the oven for a few minutes.

A baking stone (available in specialty cookware shops) or unglazed red tiles (available at tile supply stores) simulate the old-fashioned brick ovens used by bakers. When bread or pizzas are baked directly on a preheated stone or tiles, the texture is light with a superb crisp crust.

For a crisp crust on French or Italian bread, spray the loaves with a fine mist of cold water at 5- minute intervals during the first 15 minutes of baking.

When brushing puff pastry tarts with an egg wash, don't let the wash drip down the sides of the pastry. If it does, the egg wash will glue the puff pastry layers together and they won't rise properly.

Allow chilled dough to stand at room temperature until it's pliable enough to roll out easily.

To thaw unbaked puff pastry, wrap the frozen dough in a nonterry cloth towel and let it defrost for 24 hours in the refrigerator.

For best results, roll out pastry dough on either a marble or a formic a countertop. The cold surface keeps the shortening in the dough from softening.

If you can't roll out your pastry dough on a marble or Formica surface, chill your working area by rubbing it with a plastic bag filled with ice cubes. Wipe away any excess moisture before rolling the pastry.

If you want a tender and flaky pie crust, don't over flour your pastry crust as you roll it out.

To prevent pie crust from overbrowning, place a shield of aluminum foil over the edge of your pastry crust when it's baking; remove this shield for the last 15 minutes of baking time.

For best results in baking, always bring eggs to room temperature before adding them to your recipe.

Inaccurate oven gauges often ruin baked goods. Use an oven thermometer to verify the oven temperature and make any adjustments before baking begins.

Whenever possible, use the size of baking pan specified in the recipe. If a slightly smaller or larger pan must be substituted, adjust the baking time accordingly.

Want to pack additional flavor into bread crumbs? Mix them in your blender with broken crackers and cookies.

When making a cold cuts and pickles sandwich, layer the pickle slices between the cold cuts, not next to the bread. This keeps the bread from getting soggy.

If you make sandwiches with frozen bread, peanut butter, cream cheese, and other spreads can be smoothed more evenly and won't be likely to tear the bread.

When making croutons for salads or stuffing you'll find that frozen bread is easier to cut, especially with an electric knife.

Many cooks claim that the most delicious French toast is made with stale bread.

Here's one sure method of getting rolled cookies of equal thickness so some won't burn before others are fully baked. Cut a yardstick in half, and place each half flat on the right and left sides of a pastry cloth close enough to each other so your rolling pin spans them. Roll your dough between the sticks until it can't be flattened further. (The dough will be precisely the thickness of the yardstick-or any other pieces of wood you use.

An easy way to cut refrigerated cookie dough is with a wire cheese cutter.

Beaten egg yolk thinned with water makes a shiny cookie coating. When it dries, it also forms a good surface for icing designs.

You can give cookies a crisp coating by sprinkling a sugar and flour mixture on a pastry board and rolling the dough on it. If you want your rolled cookies to be thinner and crisper, put dollops of dough on a baking sheet, and then press on each with the bottom of a water glass that has been floured or moistened and dipped in sugar.

If you separate English muffin halves before freezing them you'll be able to toast them straight from the freezer.

Need another cookie sheet? Flip a baking pan over and bake your cookies on the underside of the pan.

Cookies are more difficult to remove from a baking sheet after they've cooled completely. If you're having trouble lifting them, try using a greased spatula, or reheat

the cookie sheet for a moment by running it over a stove burner or briefly returning it to a warm oven.

If you want your homemade cookies to retain moisture as long as possible, use honey rather than sugar when mixing the batter.

To make all-purpose flour as much like cake flour as possible, use 7/8 cup for every cup of cake flour listed in the recipe, and sift it twice to make it as light as possible.

You won't have dry pockets of powder on the bottom of a bowl after stirring a cake mix if you put the liquid in the bowl before adding the mix.

If you like your cakes more moist than crumbly, mix 2-4 tablespoons of salad oil into the batter.

Fruits, nuts, and raisins often sink to the bottom of cake batter. To keep them evenly dispersed, try heating them or rolling them in melted butter before adding them to the batter.

For a richer flavor, substitute devil's food cake mix for cocoa in frostings.

Worried about cholesterol? Substitute 2 stiffly beaten egg whites for every whole egg that a cake recipe calls for.

If you want a chocolate cake that's extra moist and fluffy, add a spoonful of vinegar to the baking soda.

Before you put a cake on a plate! sprinkle sugar on the plate to absorb moisture. Otherwise! the bottom of the cake may get gooey and stick to the plate.

Any cake you bake or buy will stay fresh longer if you place 1/2 an apple with it in its container. Moisture released gradually by the apple will keep the cake moist.

If the top of a cake is browning too quickly! place a pan of warm water on a rack above the cake. The browning will slow down.

When testing to see if a cake is done! you can use a stick of uncooked spaghetti if you're out of toothpicks.

Has your fruit cake dried out? It can be freshened if you turn it over! poke some holes in its bottom surface! and place a dab of frozen orange juice in each hole. As the frozen juice melts! it will spread evenly throughout the cake and make it moist. When the cake is thoroughly-but lightly-saturated! flip it over again. It will taste fresh as new.

One sure-fire way to prevent a cake from sticking to the bottom of a pan is to position a wax paper cutout on the bottom of the pan before pouring in the batter.

If you want to make a quick fancy cake topping! position an open-design paper doily on top of the cake. Dust on powdered sugar! which will sift through the doily and create an instant work of art. Lift off the doily and serve the cake.

A quick way to cool a cake layer is to place the cake pan on an upside-down colander.

Sometimes a baked cake is reluctant to come out of its pan because it has cooled too much and the grease used to coat the pan has hardened again. Loosen it-and the cake-by returning the cake to a warm oven just long enough for the pan to become warm to the touch.

Dust the layers of your cake lightly with powdered sugar before spreading on the cake filling to keep the filling from soaking into the cake.

To decorate white frosting on a cake! top it with gum drops shaved paper thin. They'll curl up like tiny flowers.

For an unusual, delectable frosting! add several drops of chocolate syrup to a prepared whipped topping.

If you like fudge frosting but find that it hardens too quickly as you apply it! mix in a teaspoon of cornstarch and keep the bowl in a pan of hot water. Spreading it on the cake will be as easy as buttering a slice of toast.

To frost a very crumbly cake! apply a thin layer of icing and let it harden completely. When this coat is set! spread a second layer of icing-it will go on easily! with no crumbs.

If you wrap a cake in wax paper that's been sprinkled with powdered sugar! the frosting won't cling to the paper .

Cake icings won't crystallize if you add a dash of salt to the sugar.

If the tiers of a multilayer cake slip as you frost it, try taming them by inserting strands of dry spaghetti. Carefully pull out the spaghetti when you're finished.

You can fashion your own cake decorating tube by rolling an ordinary piece of paper into a cone, open just slightly at the tip. Fill the cone with the icing, fold over the large end, and squeeze, holding the large end closed.

If you want chocolate slivers to decorate a fancy cake, make your own by shaving them from a candy bar with a potato peeler.

If you need to cut a cake when it's hot, use untaxed dental floss. It won't damage the cake as much as a knife would.

You'll be able to slice cleanly through cake icing if you first dip the knife blade in boiling water.

You can slice an angel food cake neatly and Food Hints without crumbs if you freeze it and then thaw it before cutting.

If you want to cut a cake into decorative party shapes, freeze it first. You'll find it much less messy to handle the frozen cake, and you'll be able to make even the most intricate shapes more easily.

So that frozen cheesecake won't lose its butter-smooth texture, thaw it slowly in your refrigerator, not at room temperature.

A spill proof way to pour cupcake batter into muffin tins is to pour it first into a squeaky clean gallon milk carton. The carton's spout lets you pour with precision.

To prevent doughnuts from burning, add potato slices to the grease.

For instant bakery treats, deep-fry refrigerator biscuit dough. You can pull the biscuits into a long-john shape, twist them like the French twists, or cut holes for doughnuts. Roll the hot biscuits in sugar or frost them; for bismarks, slit them and push in a spoonful of jelly. Served hot, they're delicious.

[Go to Top](#)

10. Pancakes, Waffles, Pies, and Dessert

A toothbrush or pastry brush is helpful in spreading oil evenly on the surface of a waffle iron.

A toothbrush can aid in cleanup, too: Use it to brush batter from the crevices.

When pancakes stick to a griddle it means they don't contain enough shortening. Mix a little more oil or melted butter into the next batch.

To reheat pancakes without overcooking them, wrap them in a dish towel and put them in a 250°F oven for a few minutes.

You can speed up the chore of cutting up pancakes for small children by using a pizza cutter-even a stack is easy to cut this way.

Crepes will be lighter if, instead of cream or milk, you use a liquid composed of 1 part water to 3 parts skim milk.

For extra delicate and tender crepes, use just enough batter to cover the pan bottom with a paper-thin layer.

The trick to freezing crepes-whether flat or rolled-is to stack them (sandwiched between sheets of wax paper), cool them, and then wrap them tightly before storing them in the freezer.

Make waffles and pancakes extra light by replacing the liquid you usually use with club soda. Don't store any of the club soda batter, because continuing effervescence will alter its texture. Use it all, or discard it.

Opt for lard rather than butter when making pie dough. Butter may give a little more flavor, but lard makes a flakier crust.

So juice can bubble out of a pie harmlessly and in one place, insert a piece of tube-type macaroni in the center of the pie before baking.

When you must cool a pie in a hurry, set the pie pan on top of a larger pan lined with ice cubes.

A powder puff kept in the flour canister is perfect for dusting flour on pastry boards and rolling pins.

To prevent pastry dough from clinging to your rolling pin, chill the pin in the freezer before flouring.

When you roll dough on wax paper, dampen the counter before spreading the paper; then the wax paper will cling smoothly to the counter. If you scrape rolling pins and pastry boards clean with a knife rather than washing them, they will be "seasoned" and dough won't stick as much the next time you use them. a pie, just slide one of your pie-shaped fillings into a crust and pop it in the oven.

To keep a fruit pie from getting soggy, dust the crust with flour before adding the filling, or sprinkle ground nuts over the bottom crust. If the fruit filling in a pie is too juicy, add a spoonful of tapioca to absorb extra juice.

To thicken juice of a fruit pie so that it won't be too runny, add a beaten egg white to the sugar you use when preparing the pie, or add a dash of flour to the fruit itself during preparation.

To make an upper pie crust extra flaky, brush the surface with a little cold water before baking.

No rolling pin handy? Use a full wine bottle.

When making a fruit pie, brush the unbaked lower crust with a beaten egg to keep the crust from soaking up too much juice and turning mushy. Or sprinkle plain bread crumbs over the bottom crust before pouring in the filling.

For a tempting brown glaze on your pie, brush the top with milk before sliding the pie in the oven.

Here's a real time- and money-saver. When fresh fruits are in season and on sale, prepare enough pie filling for several pies. Line pie pans with aluminum foil or wax paper, fill with the fruit, cover, and stack in freezer. The next time you want Frozen pies sometimes have a "dry" taste.

You can eliminate this dryness by brushing them with melted butter before baking.

Before baking a frozen pie, it's sometimes difficult to make slits in the top crust, since the crust is too hard. Warm the pie in the oven for a few minutes and then make the slits.

When making a pumpkin pie, put a layer of marshmallows on the crust before adding the filling. As the pie bakes, the marshmallows will rise and form a perfect topping.

When making pie shells, double your recipe and make a few extra. Store these in the freezer and they'll be ready for use at some later date.

Egg whites refrigerated for up to 2 weeks produce a fuller, more fluffy meringue than fresh egg whites.

Meringues were never easier. Separate the eggs while they're still cold, then let the white warm up to room temperature before beating them.

Meringue shells won't darken while baking if you grease your baking sheets with a solid vegetable shortening.

To make meringue that's extra high, add a little baking powder to the room-temperature egg whites you beat or whip for the recipe.

To stabilize meringue, add a teaspoon of lemon juice to every three egg whites.

To avoid shrinkage and watery edges in the meringue topping on a pie, spread the meringue all the way to the edge of the pie crust.

Meringue pie topping won't split or crack if you cook the pie slowly. Instead of removing the pie from the oven when the meringue turns brown, just shut off the oven, open the oven door slightly, and leave the pie for several minutes.

There are several ways to prevent a meringue from sticking to the knife when you cut a pie. You can dip your knife in boiling water or butter it before slicing the pie, or you can sprinkle a bit of sugar over the top of the meringue before you brown it.

The inverted flat top of a 2-quart, ovenproof casserole dish can double as an 8-inch pie plate.

You can avoid oven spills when baking a pie by putting it in a plain paper bag or an oven browning bag that you've cut several slits in. Bake the "bagged" pie 10 minutes longer than called for in the recipe.

Before whipping cream, chill the beater, the bowl, and the cream.

To prevent cream whipped ahead of time from separating, add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of unflavored gelatin to each cup of cream during whipping.

If you whip half a pint of cream at a time, rather than a full pint, it'll be much fluffier.

Adding a few drops of lemon juice to cream will speed the whipping process.

If you want whipped cream with good body -and in no time- whip it in a double boiler over salt and ice cubes.

For best results when adding sweetener to cream, add it after the cream has been whipped.

You can maintain whipped cream's shape- and prevent it from getting watery-if you use powdered instead of granulated sugar.

Don't be dismayed if ice crystals remain in heavy cream after you defrost it. The cream whips better in that condition.

You can remove lumps from curdled egg custard by putting the custard in a jar and shaking the jar vigorously.

For feather-light steamed pudding, replace half the flour called for with bread crumbs.

You can prevent "skin" from forming on pudding by resting plastic wrap on its surface before it cools.

Make your own parfaits by spooning different kinds of jelly between ice cream layers. Or) spoon different kinds of sherbet between ice cream layers. Half the fun of a parfait is seeing what you're eating) so make your concoction in a crystal water glass.

Chocolate melts more quickly if it is first broken or chopped into small pieces with a chef's knife or in a food processor fitted with a steel blade. If chocolate contracts into a hard lump while melting) stir in 1-2 tablespoons of solid vegetable shortening (not butter or om and beat vigorously).

When you want a pronounced chocolate flavor in your baked goods) use dark or bitter chocolate in the recipe.

Once sweet chocolate) milk chocolate, or white chocolate are melted) they must be used immediately. Unsweetened and semisweet chocolate will be usable for up to 15 minutes after melting.

If melted chocolate used for dipping becomes too thick to coat evenly) add a tablespoon or two of warm water or brewed coffee to thin it to the proper dipping consistency.

For best results) chocolate should be melted in a double boiler over hot) not boiling) water.

Working the chocolate back and forth with a spatula helps the chocolate to melt evenly.

Semisweet chocolate with its higher sugar content is best for dipping and icings because it hardens to a beautiful, glossy sheen.

To make thin chocolate curls for dessert decorations) shave room-temperature chocolate with a vegetable peeler. Refrigerate the chocolate curls after shaving.

If unsweetened baking chocolate is unavailable for a recipe) substitute 3 tablespoons of cocoa powder plus 1 tablespoon of vegetable shortening or unsalted butter for each ounce of chocolate called for in the recipe.

11. Beverages

Keep freshly ground coffee stored in a glass jar in the refrigerator to prevent it from going rancid.

It's annoying when ground coffee spills into the stem opening when you're filling the basket of a percolator pot. You can keep the ground coffee out by holding a fingertip over the stem opening when filling the basket.

Remove coffee grounds immediately after brewing so your coffee won't taste bitter.

If you run out of filters for your drip pot or percolator, simply cut a paper towel to size.

There are several ways to save on coffee. One is to grind beans until they're powdery and use 1/3 less coffee than usual. Or use 1/2 the ground coffee you normally use, but circulate the water

through the grounds twice. Or reuse old coffee grounds. Spread them on a flat pan and put them in the oven for 30 minutes at 350°F. Cool them and mix with half your usual portion of fresh ground coffee.

If your coffee is too bitter because you heated it too long, just toss in a pinch of salt to banish the bitter taste.

You can make cafe mocha without a special mix by adding an envelope of instant cocoa mix to a cup of black coffee.

If the coffee you've just brewed tastes weak, add a little instant coffee.

Out of cream? Lighten your coffee or tea with beaten egg white.

If your coffee tends to look muddy, next time start with cold water and drop in a few unwashed egg shells after brewing.

If cream curdles in your hot coffee or tea, add a pinch of baking soda to the cream before fixing your next cup.

Does your hot chocolate sometimes have an acid taste? Reduce the acidity by adding a pinch of salt before mixing with boiling water.

To give hot chocolate a butter-smooth texture, add to each pot-ful a pinch of salt and a teaspoon of cornstarch dissolved in water.

To keep the flavor fresh, store tea bags and loose tea in an airtight tin can.

For tea with intensified flavor and fragrance, store pieces of dried orange blossoms or dried orange rind in the canister.

Tea won't get cloudy if you add a pinch of baking soda to the pot.

You'll get a tastier cup of tea if you brew it in a clean china or earthenware pot, using fresh cold water that's been brought quickly to a boil.

To keep iced tea from clouding over, keep the tea at room temperature. When it's time to serve, just pour it over ice cubes. When making instant iced tea, the crystals will dissolve better if you add a tiny amount of very hot water before adding cold water.

The paper tag on your tea bag won't fall into your cup if you tuck it through the cup's handle.

Another trick-moisten the string and stick it to the rim of the cup.

To get the last remaining spoonful of honey from the jar, pour in some hot tea, close the lid, and shake gently. Not only is your jar clean, but your tea is sweetened and ready to drink.

If you don't have fresh lemon for your pitcher of iced tea you can get the same taste by adding a little lemon gelatin.

Freeze leftover tea, and add the cubes to your next glass of iced tea.

When squeezing your own orange Juice, press the orange and roll it gently on the table or countertop. You'll get more juice.

It's easy to make tomato juice into something special, fast. Pour a large can of tomato juice into a large glass jar, and add a chopped-up celery stalk and a chopped green onion. Let the mixture stand for several minutes before serving.

The quickest way to thaw frozen orange juice concentrate is to mix it with water in a blender. A quick way to dissolve frozen orange juice concentrate is to stir it with a potato masher or whisk.

To make fruit soda pop at home, partially fill a glass with a frozen juice concentrate, dissolved in water according to the instructions, and top off the glass with club soda.

If diet cola doesn't have enough "kick" or seems too artificially sweet, squeeze a lemon wedge into it. It'll taste just right.

You can cut the foam when pouring a carbonated drink over ice cubes if you first rinse the cubes with water.

It's best to keep bottled beer away from light, particularly sunlight, if you're not storing it in your refrigerator; light alters the taste-and not for the better.

Vodka will be more flavorful if kept in the refrigerator or freezer rather than in the liquor cabinet.

To extend the life of wine remaining in a jug, rebottle what's left in a regular wine bottle, leaving a minimum of air space between the cork and the wine. Doing this will help maintain the flavor of the wine.

Want to serve drinks with a flair? Freeze cherries, mint leaves, cocktail onions, and green olives in ice cubes. They're a conversation topic when added to martinis) manhattans, or other drinks.

Long, slender slices of peeled cucumber make perfect swizzle sticks for Bloody Marys.

When you chill a champagne bottle in an ice bucket, cover the bottle with ice just up to its neck.

If the ice is any higher, you may have a tough time removing the cork.

For best champagne flavor, avoid over chilling it in the refrigerator. Champagne lovers know the secret is to chill the wine briefly in an ice bucket.

Plastic corks sometimes seem impossible to remove from champagne bottles, but if you pour warm water on the bottle's neck the heat will make the bottle's neck expand and the cork will pop or slide out easily.

[Go to Top](#)

12. General Food Storage

Store apples in clear plastic rather than in a paper bag. You'll be able to spot any that are spoiling and remove them before they contaminate other fruit.

Apples that haven't ripened on the tree have been picked prematurely and won't ripen properly at home.

A sure sign that an apple is ripe is a light green color at the bottom of the fruit.

Refrigerate apples to slow down the ripening process. If you don't have room in the refrigerator, keep your apples stored in a cool place, with a wet towel placed over the top of the container to keep the apples moist but not wet. Don't let apples freeze-they will spoil.

Artichokes will maintain their freshly picked texture for almost a week if they're wrapped (un-washed) in a damp towel and stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Lettuce will rust more slowly if there is no excess moisture in its container. To keep your lettuce bag or refrigerator vegetable compartment relatively dry, put in a few dry paper towels or dry sponges to absorb excess water.

Flour freezes well so stock up when it's on sale at the supermarket.

Put a celery stalk into the bag with a loaf of bread; moisture from the celery will help keep the bread fresh longer.

Because carrot tops can rob the vegetable of moisture during storage, slice off the tops before refrigerating the carrots.

To maintain the moisture content that keeps asparagus fresh, cut a tiny slice off the bottom of each stalk, then stand all stalks upright in a container with an inch of water at the bottom and store in the refrigerator. Celery can be stored the same way-cut a slice from the bottom of the head of celery and store like asparagus.

If a head of lettuce won't drop down into a plastic storage bag because it's sticking to the sides, try putting it in the bag this way: Turn the bag inside out, put your hand in the bag, grab the lettuce head through the bag, and pull the bag right-side-out over the lettuce.

Because mushrooms can become slimy if refrigerated in a sealed plastic bag, it's better to refrigerate them in a brown paper bag. Brown paper confines the humidity that keeps mushrooms fresh and permits them to breathe.

If you sift flour directly into your canister you won't have to sift it again when you use it for baking.

To preserve the freshness of the unused portion of pasta in a box you've opened, store the remaining pasta in a tightly covered glass container.

Whole-grain cereals stay fresh longer if they're refrigerated; this is true whether the container is open or unopened.

To avoid bacteria developing, don't cool hot foods before refrigerating them.

To keep your cooking oil fresh, store it tightly sealed in a dark glass or plastic container in a cool place.

Store root vegetables such as potatoes and carrots in a cool, moist place to slow down loss of their vitamin content.

Let unripe tomatoes ripen at room temperature but away from direct sunlight. Store ripe tomatoes at cool temperatures or in the refrigerator to slow down loss of their vitamin C.

Seal leafy vegetables in plastic bags before storing them in the vegetable crisper. They'll retain their moisture and stay fresh longer.

Honey that has become granulated can be restored to smooth texture by placing the jar in boiling water. This works for syrup or jelly as well.

To store honey for long periods, freeze it in ice cube trays.

When buying frozen foods at the supermarket, be careful to choose packages stacked below the freeze line of the freezer cabinet. Don't buy products with ice on the package, ice means

the package has probably thawed and been re-frozen.

Ground coffee or coffee beans will stay fresh indefinitely if frozen or refrigerated.

To keep brown sugar from drying out, store it in a jar with a piece of apple.

If brown sugar gets hard, grate it or run it through the blender to make it powdery.

When you buy peanut butter that isn't homogenized, store it upside down to prevent the oil from rising to the top. Stir before use.

If humid weather is making your crackers soggy, store them in the freezer.

Store marshmallows in the freezer. They'll be easier to cut for cooking.

When a jar of jam, mustard, or mayonnaise is almost empty, store the container on its side.

This makes it easier to scrape out the last of the contents.

Pate a chaux puffs that have been stored in a tin for several days benefit from being crisped in a 350°F oven, then cooled before filling.

Pate a choux-puffs freeze well and don't need to be defrosted before serving. Just heat them in a 400°F oven for a few minutes, then cool before filling.

Whole un-blanched nuts, purchased in bulk, are generally cheaper than packaged nuts. They can be stored in the freezer and used as needed.

To avoid spoilage after a can of tomato paste has been opened and partially used, freeze the remainder in tablespoon-size portions. The frozen paste can be dropped into a sauce when needed.

Poached eggs can be refrigerated in cold water for several days. To reheat, place the eggs in a strainer, lower into boiling water for about 1 minute, and serve right away.

Peeled fresh ginger root will stay fresh for months if stored in white wine or dry sherry, tightly covered, and refrigerated.

If you want hot chilies to keep their "kick," store them loosely sealed in a brown paper bag in your refrigerator.

To keep a leftover onion slice fresh as long as possible, rub the open side with butter.

Instead of discarding leftover spaghetti noodles, cut them into small pieces and store in your freezer. The next time you make spaghetti sauce, add the noodles to the mixture.

A good way to save leftover dinner Wine for cooking is to pour a thin film of vegetable or olive oil over its surface. The film Will preserve its flavor by sealing out air.

The best way to keep leftover cold cuts fresh, Without freezing them, is to roll them up and put them in a covered glass container in your refrigerator.

13. Home Preserving: Canning, Freezing, Drying

When selecting fruit and vegetables for home canning, try to buy them in approximately the same size so they'll cook more evenly before canning.

To make sure that canned foods keep a fresh flavor, choose only those foods that are firm, ripe, and fresh, With no bruises that Will spoil overtime.

Always wash foods thoroughly before canning; discard any rotting sections.

Fruits, tomatoes, and pickles are acid foods and can be safely preserved by canning by the boiling water bath method.

Use a pressure canner to prepare low-acid foods such as meats and vegetables.

Label all your preserved foods with the contents and the date.

To cool hot jars removed from the canner, set them uncovered on a cloth, board, or wire rack, away from any draft.

Some supermarket jars can be used for canning if you select them very carefully. Jam and jelly jars can be used for canning jams and jellies, and some ketchup bottles can be used for special vinegars.

When you're canning and preserving, match the jar size to the eventual serving size whenever possible. Then you won't have a refrigerator full of half-empty jars.

You can process 2 layers of jars in your canner if you place a small Wire rack between them, so that water and steam can circulate evenly in the space between the 2 layers.

An easy way to check whether a jar is sealed is to tap the lid with a metal spoon. If you hear a ringing sound, the jar is sealed.

If the seal of a canned jar won't move down when pressed, the jar is properly sealed and ready for storage.

It's easier to fill the jars if you use a wide-neck funnel placed on top of the jar, then spoon the contents into the funnel.

Don't open a processed jar to add more liquid. You'll have to reprocess the jar to prevent the contents from spoiling.

To prevent canned foods from darkening, rinse the foods in a quart of cold water mixed with 1 1/2 teaspoons of salt.

Discoloration can also be prevented by adding 50 mg of vitamin C to each quart jar.

To prevent cut fruits from discoloring before preserving, place them in a gallon of water mixed with 3 tablespoons of lemon juice. Drain well before packing in jars.

Table salt leaves sediment in the bottom of canning jars, so use canning or pickling salt instead. Vegetables can be canned without salt if you're on a salt-free diet.

Before canning fresh fish, soak it in a solution of brine (8 ounces of salt to 1 gallon of water) for between 10 and 60 minutes depending on the size of the fish.

Eliminate any air bubbles by working a flexible knife or spatula around the inside of a filled canning jar.

Place several marbles in the kettle when you're making jelly preserves! apple butter! or other foods requiring continuous stirring. The marbles will roll constantly across the kettle bottom and prevent sticking.

When you're mixing homemade jelly! use a potato masher for stirring. The handle is long enough to keep your hand cool and the shape prevents the masher from slipping into the pot.

To test whether fruit juice contains enough pectin to jell, mix 2 tablespoons of cooked fruit juice with 2 teaspoons of sugar and 1 tablespoon Epsom salts and let stand for 20 minutes. If the juice contains enough pectin the mixture should form into a semisolid.

For pickling! be sure your vinegar has at least 5 percent acidity; otherwise your pickles may soften and spoil.

Preserve cucumbers within 24 hours of harvesting! before they have a chance to get soft or hollow.

If canned food smells strange or looks cloudy after opening! discard it immediately without tasting it.

If the lid on a canning jar is bulging! the contents may be spoiled.

To avoid spoilage and explosions! home canned foods should be stored out of direct light and away from direct heat sources.

When you open a jar of canned food that's been stored for some time! watch for spurting liquid. If any liquid does spurt out! the contents have spoiled.

Two of the easiest alternatives to canning are winter storage during cold weather months and dehydration in dry climates. In winter storage! such

vegetables as celery! Brussels sprouts! turnips! and winter radishes can be left outdoors if well mulched. Dehydration involves letting the hot sun do all the work or purchasing a dehydrator.

If you don't have a water bath canner you can improvise with a large pot with a rack inside. The rack prevents the jars from breaking as they would if they stood directly on the bottom of the pot. If you're using pint jars! the pot should be 8 to 10 inches deep; for quart jars! 9 to 12 inches.

If someone in the family is on a sugar- or salt-free diet! these ingredients can be omitted from many recipes! but not from recipes for pickles and preserves. In these cases the sugar and salt are essential to the canning process.

When you freeze food! label each package to avoid future guesswork. Mark the contents and the date on each package.

When you freeze food in a plastic bag! remove as much air from the bag as you can.

Thaw frozen foods by placing the container under cold running water for a few minutes. Then place the container in a pan of lukewarm water until the food slips out easily.

Dial gauges on a pressure canner must be checked each canning season. The home economist at your local Cooperative Extension Service Office can tell you where and when you can have the dial tested. If the dial varies more than 5 pounds per square inch either way, get a new one.

If the variation is less than 5 pounds, adjust pressure using the chart below. Weighted gauges don't need to be tested, but they must be kept clean.

Adjustment for inaccurate dial gauges If gauge reads Process at low by:
pressure of:

Don't freeze overripe foods. They'll have no flavor or color after you defrost them.

Because freezing expands liquids and foods, be sure to leave about a 1/2-inch space at the top of each package before putting it in your freezer.

Otherwise the lid might pop off, or the container might crack or burst.

You can freeze homemade soup by storing it in clean 1/2-gallon milk cartons and stapling the tops closed.

Freeze pastry shells unfilled. They won't become soggy when thawed.

Don't let vegetables or fruits sit in water for any length of time before freezing. Rinse them quickly with water, and drain them well.

To prevent home-frozen vegetables from changing in flavor or color, blanch them with boiling water or steam before packaging and freezing.

Delicate vegetables like asparagus should be briefly tray frozen before they're packaged. First blanch the vegetables and drain them well, then spread them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze them until just solid. Then transfer them to containers and store them in the freezer.

Freeze fresh dill in season so you'll have it on hand for pickling time. Many other herbs also freeze well.

Freeze small amounts of herbs in individual plastic packets; seal each packet well, label it, and staple the packets to a piece of cardboard.

For readymade bouquets garnish, tie together several sprigs of different herbs (for instance, parsley, bay leaf, and thyme), and freeze in individual plastic bags stapled to a piece of cardboard.

If you want the blueberries you freeze to retain their shape and color, don't wash them.

Simply freeze them in their containers, and wash them just before use.

To prevent foods such as berries from sticking together when frozen, flash freeze them first.

Here's how: Separate them on a cookie sheet, freeze, remove, and while still frozen-pack them together in airtight containers before replacing them in the freezer.

Instant beef stock can come from the freezer, too. When you cook a beef roast, save and refrigerate the pan juices. After the fat has hardened, remove and discard it. Pour the remaining juice into an ice cube tray; when the juice is frozen, wrap the cubes individually in foil and store in the freezer for later use.

Save watermelon rinds from meals or picnics.

Keep them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator until you have enough to pickle.

If you have leftover tomatoes, freeze them for later use in stews and soups. Freezing makes them soft, but this won't affect their taste.

The warmth of a gas range pilot light makes an oven a perfect food dehydrator. Chop the food you want to dry, spread it on aluminum foil, and place it on the broiler rack for a day or two. This system, however, only works for foods that won't spoil before drying is complete.

Uncooked souffles can be successfully frozen. Pour the batter into the soufflé dish, then cover the dish tightly with plastic wrap before placing it on a level spot in the freezer. If using a freezer-to-oven dish, the soufflé can be baked

directly from the freezer. If using a china or porcelain soufflé dish, remove it from the freezer 30 minutes before baking. In both cases, bake the soufflé for twice as long as the recipe indicates.

If you have a gas stove with a pilot light, you can dry fresh parsley by placing it on a cookie sheet in your oven, where the slight heat from the pilot light will evaporate its moisture in a few days.

When the parsley feels dry to the touch, put it in jars and store in a cool, dry place.

When you're drying herbs for their seeds- dill or caraway, for example-hang small bunches in a warm, dry place and tie a paper bag over each bunch to catch the seeds.

[Go to Top](#)

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