



cooking**clarified**



10 ROOKIE COOKING MISTAKES TO AVOID

For a novice cook, a kitchen, a recipe and assorted foodstuff can become a veritable culinary minefield. As a cooking instructor, I've seen firsthand many of the pitfalls beginning cooks fall victim to. And it's not pretty. I've had the pleasure of witnessing the most common cooking mistakes and I'm sharing the tips you need to avoid them.



1

NOT Reading Your Recipe

Reading a recipe gives you chance to both familiarize yourself with what you'll actually be doing with the food and to make sure you have all the required ingredients and supplies. A quick read before you get cooking will also make it much less likely that you'll add ingredients in the wrong order, leave something out or do anything else that may compromise your dish. Think of your recipe as an instruction manual for your meal and your first instruction is to read the instructions.

2

Adding Food to Cold Pans

Unless your recipe gives you specific instruction to do otherwise, give your pan (and any oil you've added) a little time to heat up before adding any food. Heat encourages foods of all kinds to release whatever moisture they have stored inside. Adding food to a pan that's hot will create an instant seal around the food that will help keep all the moisture (and flavor) inside. In a warm pan, your food will lose its moisture and you'll find your chicken breast or mushrooms (or whatever else) stewing in their own juices. A hot pan should give you a glorious sizzle when you add food to it. If you don't hear the sizzle, don't be afraid to pull the food out while you wait for the temperature to rise.

3

NOT Seasoning to Taste

Tasting and seasoning your food as you go should fast become a regular part of your routine while cooking. Next to actually cooking the food, tasting as you cook is arguably the most important part of cooking. Seriously, cooking without tasting would be like painting a picture without looking at it. I'm not giving you carte blanche to double dip with your tasting spoon or to dump loads of salt and pepper willy-nilly into everything, but seasoning and tasting are critical steps in preparing food. Trust me, if you season and taste as you go, your food will taste better. Add small pinches of salt and pepper, give them a minute or two to cook into the food then taste to see where you are.

4

Causing Too Much of a Stir

I've seen cooks, beginners and experienced alike, stand over a pan and stir and stir and stir or flip and re-flip and flip again and again, over and over and over because cooks like to feel (and look) busy. Put the spatula, wooden spoon, tongs or whatever you're working with down and step away from the food. Every time you stir/putz/flip the food, it loses contact with the pan and has to start the heating process all over again. So by over-tending, you're actually extending your cooking time and you run the risk of altering the food's texture and color by moving it around too much. When in doubt it's best to put the food into a hot pan and then... wait for it, wait for it...let it cook.

5

Over Crowding Your Pan

Adding any amount of food to a pan lowers the temperature in the pan. The more food added, the lower the temperature falls. A crowded pan will cool down a lot faster and as your pan cools down, your food will stick, won't brown and it will release all its moisture into the pan. Try cooking food in batches, a little at a time, so it cooks properly. For smaller foods, add only enough to cover the bottom of the pan in one even layer. Larger foods, like chicken pieces or steak, should have an inch or two between them and should never touch.



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6

Getting the Measurements Wrong

Teaspoons, tablespoons, cups, pinches, sticks. Mix these up and you're headed for a cooking disaster. Invest in a set of measuring cups and spoons and get to know them. Over time you'll be able to guesstimate amounts but to start, put your measuring cups and spoons to use. Check the labels of foods that aren't measuring cup or spoon-friendly, like butter and cream cheese. They're typically marked for easy measuring.

7

Using Less Than Stellar Ingredients

One way to produce mediocre food is to use mediocre ingredients. You can elevate your meals simply by choosing the finest ingredients you can find. Look for fresh produce free of blemishes or bruises, top-notch meats and seafood, and pantry items from brands you trust.

8

Not Checking Your Oven Temperature

Over time your oven can slip out of calibration and the temperature setting may no longer match the actual temperature inside your oven. Buying an oven thermometer

at the supermarket will be the best ten bucks you'll spend. Place the thermometer on the center rack of your oven, turn the oven on and wait to see if your temps add up.

9

Using the Wrong Tool for the Job

You wouldn't paint a wall with a toothpick so don't use the wrong tool, appliance or ingredient when you cook. A good recipe will give you specifics about the items you'll need to prepare your dish. Pay attention to those details and avoid common goofs like using the wrong size pot or pan or ruining your non-stick pans with a metal spoon.

10

Choosing the Wrong Cooking Oil

All oils are not created equally. Use lighter, less expensive oils, like vegetable or canola oil, for cooking at high temperatures. (Think deep-frying.) Save the pricey, more flavorful oils (extra virgin olive oil, hazelnut or walnut oils) for dishes or recipes where you'll be able to enjoy their flavors, like vinaigrettes, or finishing dishes.

Spread the yum!

If this tip sheet was helpful to you feel free to share it!



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