

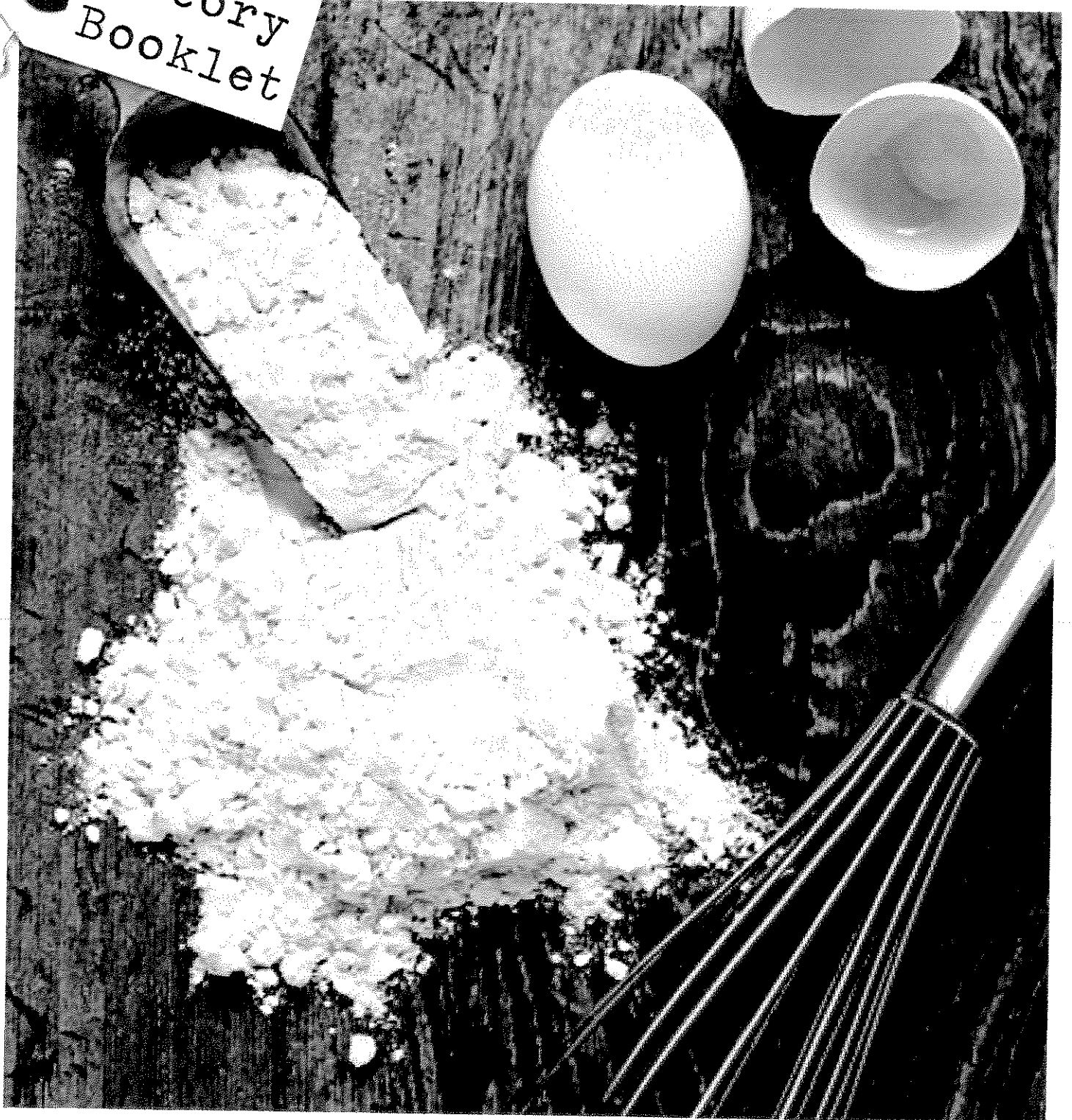
# CREATIVE BAKING

Mrs. Klatt

Foods 30

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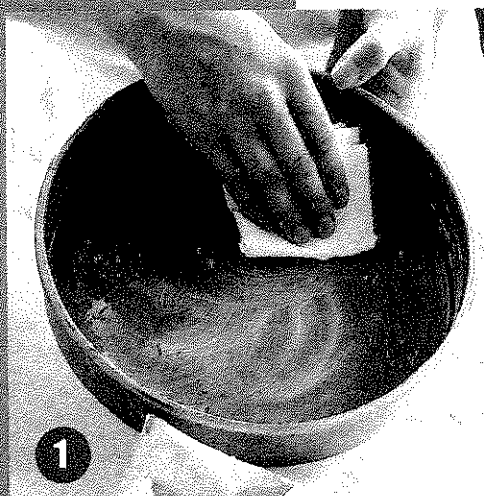
Theory  
Booklet



# Little things make a big difference

**T**hroughout this issue we have offered tips and techniques for working with our star ingredient: chocolate. To guarantee that these recipes turn out their best, however, some general baking knowledge comes in handy. Many of you will know much of this—how to best measure wet and dry ingredients, what it means to beat egg whites to medium peaks—but we hope even the savviest bakers may pick up a useful nugget among the photos, captions, and text on these next few pages.

## Preparing a baking pan



*Grease the pan liberally with a visible coating of vegetable shortening, soft butter, or vegetable oil spray. Too little grease is the most common cause of sticking cakes.*



*If your recipe calls for flouring the pan, spoon a generous amount of flour into the pan and tilt it so the flour slides over all the inside surfaces of the pan. Dump out any extra and then give the pan a few hard knocks over a trash can to get rid of any excess.*

If you've ever experienced the heartbreak of a cake sticking to its baking pan, chances are you didn't prepare the pan well enough. For cakes that slide flawlessly out of their pans every time, follow these steps.

### tip:

If your recipe tells you to line the pan with parchment, be sure it lies flat and fits inside the edges of the pan. Wrinkled parchment can cause problems. In most cases, it's a good idea to grease the pan before fitting the parchment.

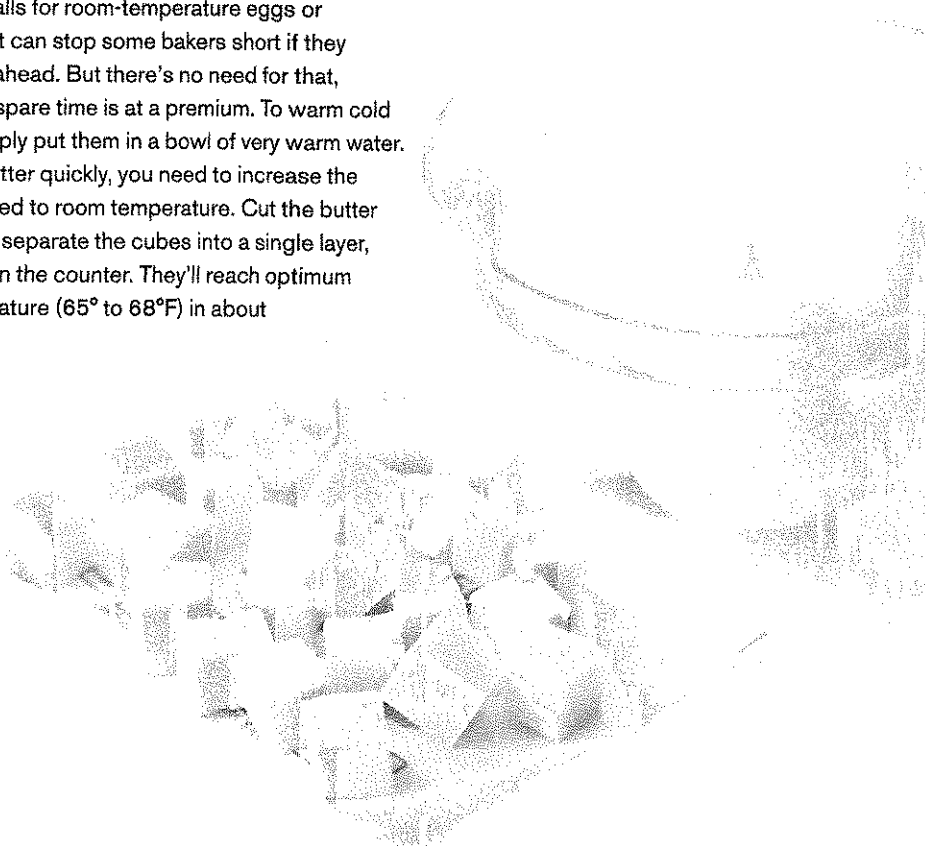
tip:

### Check it early, check it often

Lots of variables come into play whenever you bake. Oven performance varies, baking pans are made of different materials, and ingredients differ, too. All these things can cause slight variations in the way batters and doughs behave in the oven, and that's why we give specific doneness clues as well as time ranges in our recipes. Just to be on the safe side, though, it's good to get in the habit of checking on your cakes and cookies a few minutes before the recipe indicates. And once they're getting close to done, check on them often; some baked goods can go from underdone to overdone in a flash.

## Room-temperature eggs & butter in a hurry

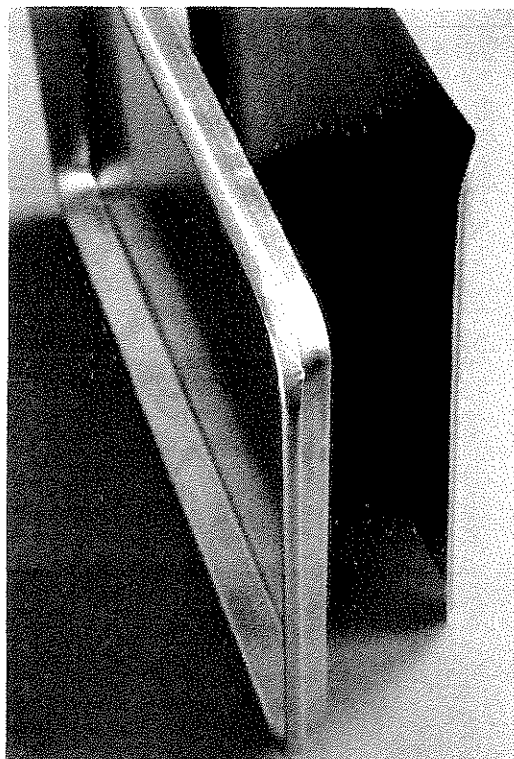
When a recipe calls for room-temperature eggs or softened butter, it can stop some bakers short if they haven't planned ahead. But there's no need for that, especially when spare time is at a premium. To warm cold eggs quickly, simply put them in a bowl of very warm water. To soften cold butter quickly, you need to increase the area that's exposed to room temperature. Cut the butter into small cubes, separate the cubes into a single layer, and let them sit on the counter. They'll reach optimum creaming temperature (65° to 68°F) in about 30 minutes.



## what we mean by: Cookie sheet

When we call for a cookie sheet in our recipes, we mean the kind of baking sheet that doesn't have a rim all the way around it, shown at near left. A cookie sheet has at least one and as many as three rimless sides, which aid the flow of hot air to the cookies, as well as make it easier to remove the cookies from the sheet once they're baked. In many instances, using a rimmed baking sheet (also known as a half sheet pan or a jellyroll pan, shown far left) instead of a cookie sheet won't make any difference, but sometimes it does. Sugar cookies, for instance, don't brown as evenly on a rimmed sheet. So for the very best results from our baking recipes, use a cookie sheet when one is called for.

*Left, rimmed baking sheet;  
right, cookie sheet.*





### Make a pan deeper

if your cake pan needs height, follow these steps: Cut two 6x16-inch strips of parchment. Fold the two strips lengthwise to get two 3x16-inch strips. Butter one side of each strip. Line the inside edge of the pan with the strips, nestling them into each other, with the folded edge on the top and the buttered side facing in.

## Making the most of measuring

When it comes to baking, accurate ingredient measurements can make the difference between terrific baked goods and so-so ones. Here are some of the guidelines we use in our test kitchen for consistent measuring.

**LIQUIDS:** Always use *liquid measures* (spouted glass and metal cups and beakers graduated with cup measurements and fluid ounces) for liquids, unless you're measuring table- and teaspoons. Put the cup on a level surface and get yourself at eye level with the measure before assessing the amount of liquid in the cup.

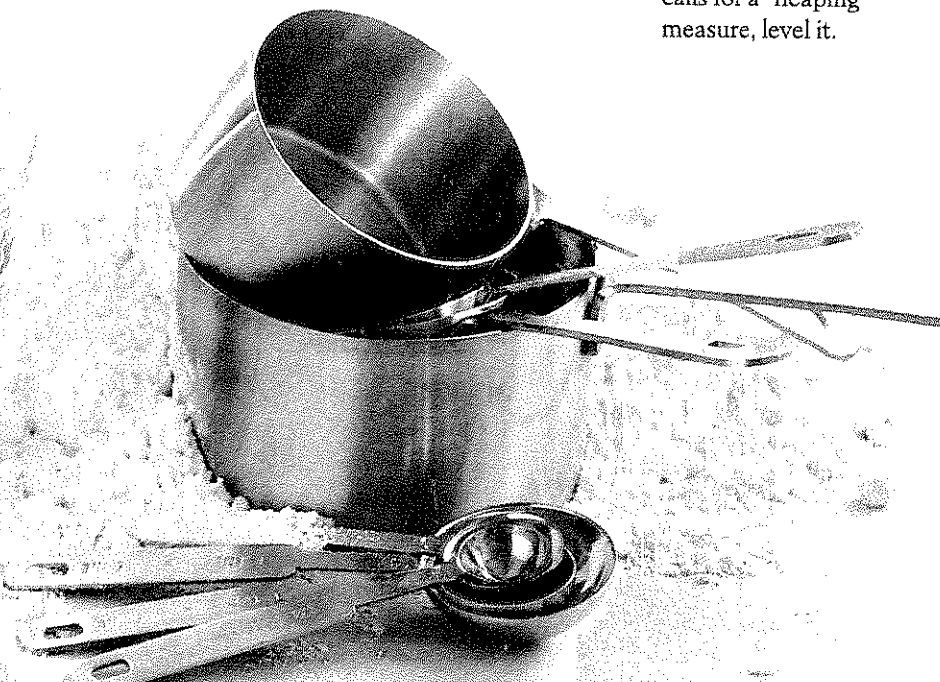
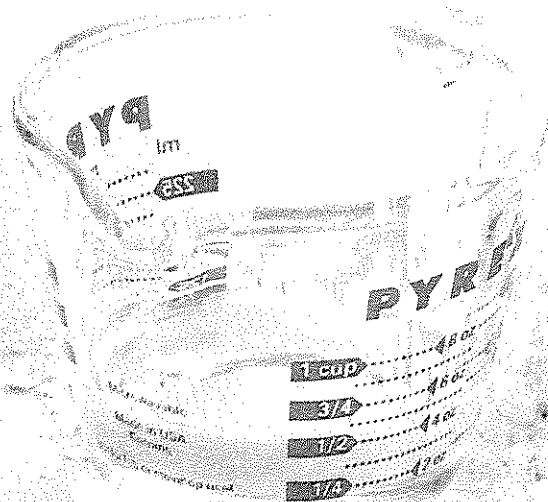
**FLOUR:** Weighing is the best way to measure flour, which is why we give a weight first in our recipes. If you must measure by volume (cups), always stir the flour a little and then spoon it into the cup before leveling with the flat side of a knife. If you scoop the cup directly into the flour, the flour will be compacted into it, and you'll get too much. Extra flour means your dough will

be drier or tougher than it should be. Scooping is also inconsistent. In consecutive tests using the same flour and measuring cup, weights differed by as much as 1/2 ounce, depending on how much pressure was used when scooping.

If your recipe calls for sifting, be sure to sift at the right time. "One cup flour, sifted" means you should sift *after* measuring; "one cup sifted flour" means you should sift *before*.

**SUGAR:** Granulated white sugar is relatively dense and heavy, so it doesn't make much difference if you scoop or spoon the sugar into the cup. But treat confectioners' sugar as you would flour. For brown sugar, measure by scooping the cup into the sugar and packing it in.

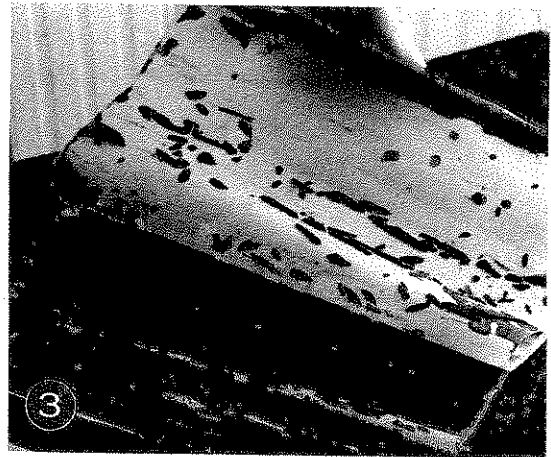
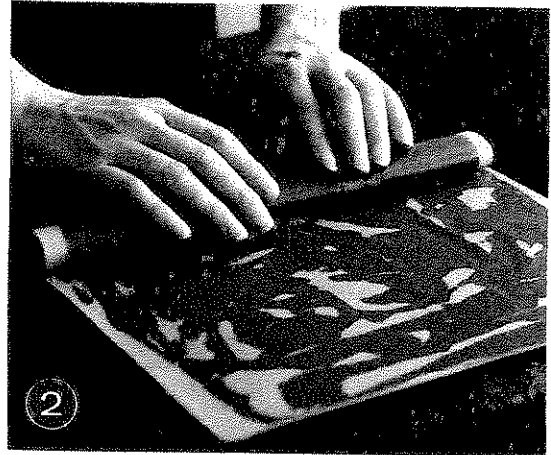
**OTHER DRY GOODS:** Always use *dry measures* (measuring cups and spoons that hold the exact amount) for dry ingredients like spices, grains, cornstarch, baking powder, etc. Unless the recipe calls for a "heaping" measure, level it.





## Are the brownies done?

The key to brownies with a moist, fudgy interior is to bake them just until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with small bits of brownie attached. Baking any longer will result in dry, overcooked brownies.



## How to make easy, decorative chocolate shards

First, melt 4 oz. chopped bittersweet chocolate in a clean, dry heatproof bowl set in a wide pan of nearly simmering water, stirring frequently with a dry spatula until smooth. Remove the bowl from the water and wipe the bottom dry. Then:

① Tear off two 16-inch-long sheets of waxed paper. Scrape the melted chocolate onto one sheet and spread with an offset metal spatula in a thin, even layer to within about  $\frac{1}{3}$  inch from each edge. Cover the chocolate with the second sheet of waxed paper.

② Starting at one short edge, roll the paper and chocolate into a narrow tube about 1 inch in diameter. Refrigerate the tube seam side down on a baking sheet for at least two hours.

③ Remove the tube from the fridge and quickly unroll it while the chocolate is still cold and brittle to crack it into long curved shards. Peel back the top sheet of waxed paper.

④ Immediately slide a metal spatula under the chocolate to release it from the waxed paper, and then slide the shards onto a rimmed baking sheet. Refrigerate until ready to use. Warm fingers will melt the shards, so handle them with a spatula or tongs.

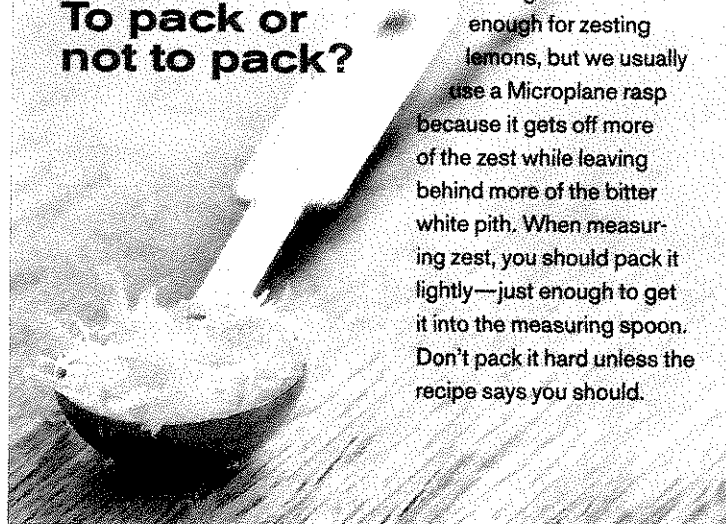
# How to fill a pastry bag

If you've never done it before, the idea of working with a pastry bag might seem a little daunting. But it's actually quite fun, especially once you get the hang of loading the filling into the bag. Here's how to make this potentially messy step neat and easy:

First, attach the piping tip, using a plastic coupler if need be (consult the instructions that came with your tips). Fold the top of the bag into a wide cuff, and hold the bag under this cuff. **1** Using a long spatula, transfer the filling into the bag. With the hand holding the bag, pinch the spatula as you pull it out of the bag to slide the filling off the spatula. Once the bag is half full—don't fill it more than halfway or it will be hard to pipe—unfold the cuff, lay the bag on the counter, and use a bench knife or the side of your hand to force the filling into the tip of the bag. **2** Twist the bag closed and, before you begin piping, squeeze a little of the filling into a small bowl to force out any air trapped near the tip.



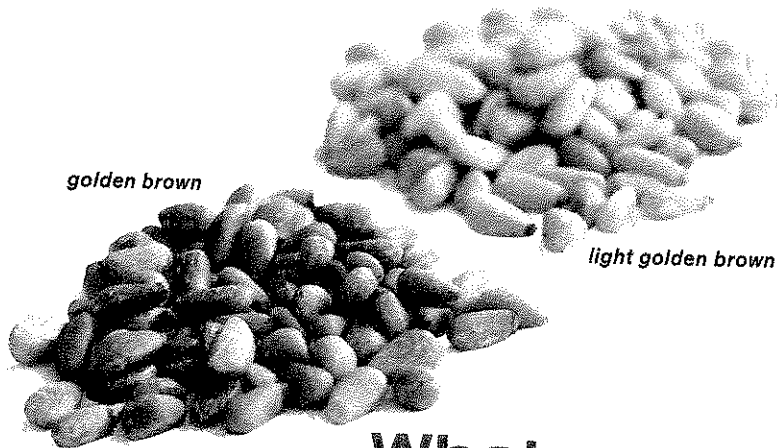
## Zest: To pack or not to pack?



We often call for finely grated lemon zest in our recipes. The small holes on a box grater work well enough for zesting lemons, but we usually use a Microplane rasp because it gets off more of the zest while leaving behind more of the bitter white pith. When measuring zest, you should pack it lightly—just enough to get it into the measuring spoon. Don't pack it hard unless the recipe says you should.

## tip: Separating eggs smartly

To get the best volume and stability out of whipped egg whites, it's crucial that your bowl and beaters be immaculately clean and that there be no trace of egg yolk in the whites (fat inhibits whipping). If you need to separate lots of eggs, separate each egg individually over a small bowl. This way, you'll be sure that each white is clean before adding it to the others in your beating bowl, and there's no chance that the last egg you separate will break its yolk and contaminate a bowl full of whites.



## What we mean by “golden brown”

You often see the term “golden brown” used in recipes as an indicator of doneness, but like all colors, there are many shades of golden brown. So how do you know when something is golden brown enough? Generally, the darker brown something is, the more flavorful it will be. Pie crust and nuts are two perfect examples: Many cooks tend to let them get only a little golden for fear of burning them, when actually letting them go just a minute or two more for a darker shade of golden brown would mean fuller flavor. So unless a recipe calls for “light golden brown,” go ahead and push the golden envelope a little. Just don’t wander off and let things go from deeply golden brown to burnt.

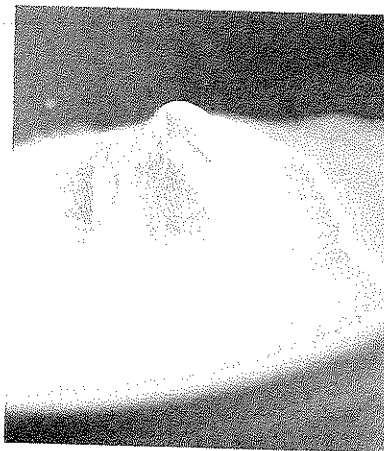


## Vanilla varieties

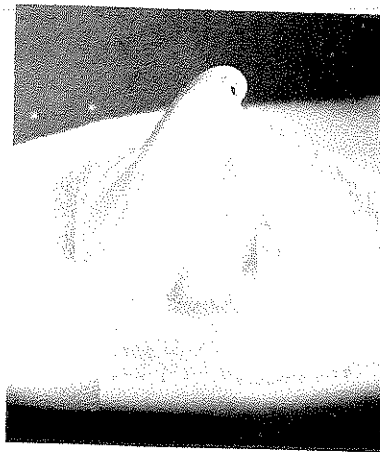
Just like wine or olive oil, the flavor of vanilla beans varies depending on where they’re grown, so it’s likely that in your supermarket you’ll see vanilla beans and extract labeled Tahitian, Mexican, or Madagascar. If you’re confused about which type to buy, consider their flavor profiles. Tahitian vanilla is known for its fragrant floral aroma, Mexican vanilla is nutty, and Madagascar vanilla is typically sweet and buttery. Choose one to suit your taste.

## Soft, medium, and firm peaks

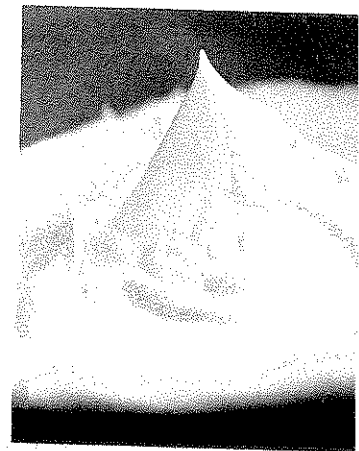
Quite a few of the chocolate recipes in this issue have you whipping cream or egg whites to a particular firmness, or peak stage. These photos show you what those stages should look like.



*Soft peaks barely hold their shape. The peaks flop over immediately when the beaters are lifted.*



*Medium peaks hold their shape pretty well, except that the tip of the peak curls over into itself when the beaters are lifted.*



*Firm peaks stand straight up when the beaters are lifted. (Medium-firm peaks stand firm but with a slight curl at the tip.)*



## Why we prefer unbleached flour

In the test kitchen, we use Gold Medal unbleached all-purpose flour for our baked goods (unless a recipe states otherwise) because we like to use products that are as natural as possible. Bleached flour contains additives that whiten the flour and, in some cases, affect its baking properties.

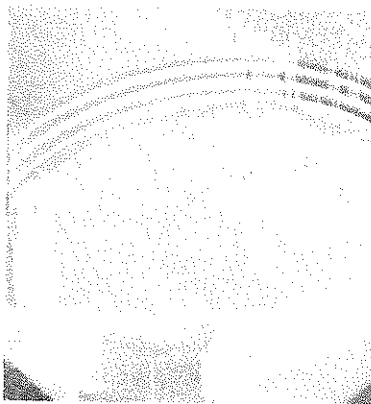
Occasionally, we call for bleached flour when it makes a difference. For instance, we sometimes use cake flour (which is always bleached) because the chlorine that's used to bleach it has an effect on the wheat starch that produces a more finely textured cake.

**tip:** Corn syrup is the secret to the velvety texture of the hot fudge sauce on p. 101. To get the last bit of syrup out of the glass bottle, briefly heat the "empty" bottle in the microwave (for about 20 seconds on high) to liquefy any syrup that remains sticking to the sides of the bottle. This trick works for other syrups, too, such as honey and molasses, but be careful with plastic jars. Some plastic containers, especially honey bears, may start to melt along with the syrup.

## "Blooming" gelatin



*Sprinkle or "rain" the powdered gelatin evenly over its softening liquid to keep lumps from forming.*



*Set the gelatin aside for a few minutes until it swells or "blooms" as it absorbs the liquid.*



*Melt the gelatin either in a hot water bath or in a microwave (for about 10 seconds on high) until it becomes translucent. Use your fingers to check that all the granules have totally dissolved.*

Gelatin isn't an everyday ingredient, but learning to work with it can give you spectacular-looking desserts: it's what gives the gorgeous sheen to the roulade's glaze on p. 69 and what gives the excellent texture to the mousse for the parfait on p. 86. Working with gelatin (a stabilizer derived from animal collagen) isn't difficult, but before adding it to a recipe, it must be softened and then melted. For powdered gelatin, the softening process is also known as "blooming" which is shown in the photos here.

### Gelatin tips

- ❖ For every 2 tsp. powdered gelatin, use about ¼ cup liquid for blooming.
- ❖ One ¼-oz. packet of Knox brand powdered gelatin contains about 2¼ tsp.
- ❖ Always add softened gelatin to warm or hot mixtures; adding the gelatin to a cold mixture will make it firm up immediately, creating an unpleasant stringy or lumpy texture.
- ❖ Although powdered gelatin is the form most widely used by home cooks, sheet gelatin is preferred by some pros. The sheets are standardized regardless of thickness or dimension, so two sheets equal 1 tsp. Knox brand powder (other powder brands may differ in their gelling power). Soften sheet gelatin by soaking it in cold water for about 10 minutes. Squeeze it to drain excess liquid before you melt it into the liquid ingredients in the recipe.



**TIP**

## Gelatin tips

- For every 2 tsp. powdered gelatin, use about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup liquid for blooming.
- One  $\frac{1}{4}$ -oz. packet of Knox brand powdered gelatin contains about 2 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp.
- Always add softened gelatin to warm or hot mixtures; adding the gelatin to a cold mixture will make it firm up immediately, creating an unpleasant stringy or lumpy texture.
- Although powdered gelatin is the form most widely used by home cooks, sheet gelatin is preferred by some pros. The sheets are standardized regardless of thickness or dimension, so 2 sheets equal 1 tsp. Knox brand powder (other powder brands may differ in their gelling power). Soften sheet gelatin by soaking it in cold water for about 10 minutes. Squeeze it to drain excess liquid before you melt it into the liquid ingredients in the recipe.

**INGREDIENT**

## Bittersweet or semisweet

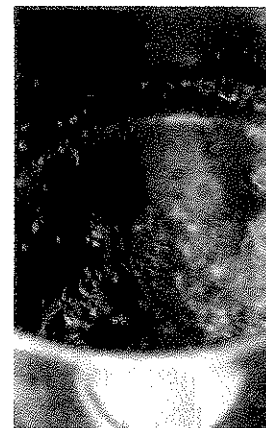
Traditionally, bittersweet and semisweet chocolate chips can be used interchangeably, with semisweet giving a slightly sweeter result. Try a little of each in the **Kahlúa Truffle Triangles** on p. 66. Bittersweet generally contains less sugar than semisweet, but the distinction between the two types becomes hazy between brands. For example, a bittersweet chocolate offered by a supermarket brand likely has more sugar than a semisweet chocolate made by a premium chocolate maker.

**TIP**

## Quick caramel cleanup

After you make the **Basic Caramel** on p. 69, you'll have a very sticky pan to clean. The easiest way to clean a caramel-coated pan is to boil water in it until the sugar has completely dissolved. Then just pour out the water, let the pan cool, and wash with soap and water.

For ramekins or other vessels that can't go directly on the stovetop, pour boiling water into them, let soak until cool, and repeat as necessary until all the caramel is gone.



Natural cocoa

**INGREDIENT**

## Cocoa powder

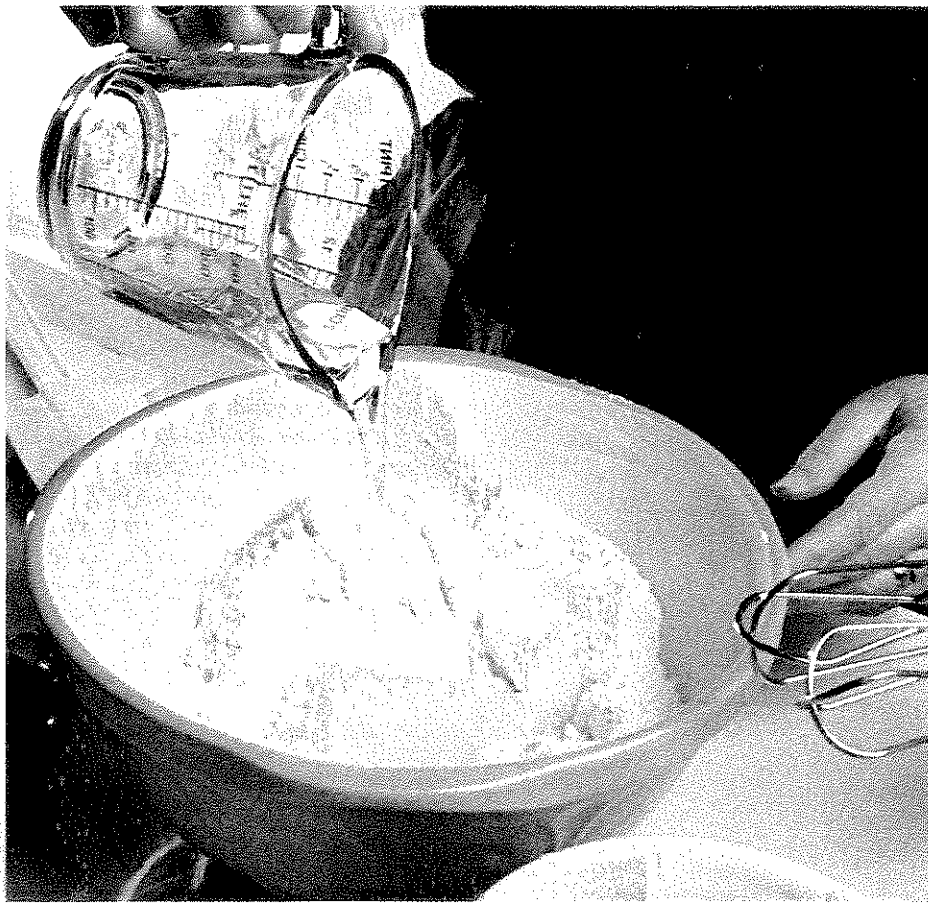
You might notice that some recipes in this issue call for unsweetened regular, or "natural," cocoa powder, like the **Checkerboard Cookies** on p. 33, while others call for Dutch-processed cocoa, such as the **Chocolate-Mint Thumbprints** on p. 55. Regular cocoa is intense and full flavored; it's also somewhat acidic. Dutch-processed cocoa (also called Dutched or European style) is treated with an alkali to neutralize its acidity. The treatment process, invented by a Dutchman in 1828, smooths and mellows the cocoa's flavor and darkens its color. The two types of cocoa aren't necessarily interchangeable because the leavening agents in recipes are typically balanced against the specific pH of the cocoa called for. (That is, baking soda, which is alkaline, is generally paired with natural cocoa to neutralize its acidity; baking powder is paired with Dutched cocoa because both ingredients are essentially neutral already.) A well-stocked baker's pantry includes both types. Dutched cocoa isn't as widely available as natural cocoa, but some supermarkets do carry both. For source information for Dutched cocoa, see p. 118.

Dutch-processed cocoa



# The Baker's Dozen: 13 secrets to perfect cakes

CAKE BAKING IS A SEEMINGLY MIRACULOUS ENDEAVOR. Flour, eggs, butter, and sugar come together to create an impressive sweet treat. Here, we take the mystery out of the process— with expert answers to your top cake questions.



### < 1. CAKE QUANDARY:

How can I make angel food or chiffon cakes that are tender, not chewy?

#### SOLVED:

Pay close attention when you beat your egg whites; what stage you whip them to makes all the difference in the height and texture of the finished cake. As whites whip, their color changes from very pale yellow to white. Properly beaten whites will look smooth, wet, and shiny and will form soft peaks. If in doubt, it's preferable to underbeat whites slightly than to overbeat them. Overbeaten whites look lumpy and dull and form big white clumps when you fold them into another mixture. Because their air bubbles are overworked, they're more likely to collapse in the oven, resulting in a cake that's more chewy than tender.

### 2. CAKE QUANDARY:

Why do eggs need to be beaten into a batter one at a time?

#### SOLVED:

The reason to add eggs slowly or one at a time is that it helps keep the batter emulsified, which is important for the cake's final texture. If you add all the eggs at once, the batter could break and look curdled. This could cause it to lose volume (that is, air pockets would collapse), and the baked cake would not be as light. That's the theory, anyway. In reality, most folks will neither see nor taste the difference between a cake baked from a broken batter or an emulsified one, although side-by-side comparisons would show a difference.

### < 3. CAKE QUANDARY:

The cake recipes I see that call for oil instead of butter reference the "wet-dry mixing method"—what is this and why does it matter?

#### SOLVED:

The wet-dry method in recipes calls for you to mix all the dry ingredients in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, you mix the liquid ingredients (usually oil and sometimes milk). You add the liquid to the dry ingredients in a few stages, which lets the fat coat all the flour proteins and prevents the formation of gluten. Cakes made in this manner bake up heavier than those made by the creaming method (which involves beating air bubbles into butter, then beating in the sugar until the mixture is light and fluffy). But the wet-dry method results in cakes so tender that they fall apart in the mouth. Be sure to follow the method specified in the recipe for the correct results.

### ✓ 4. CAKE QUANDARY:

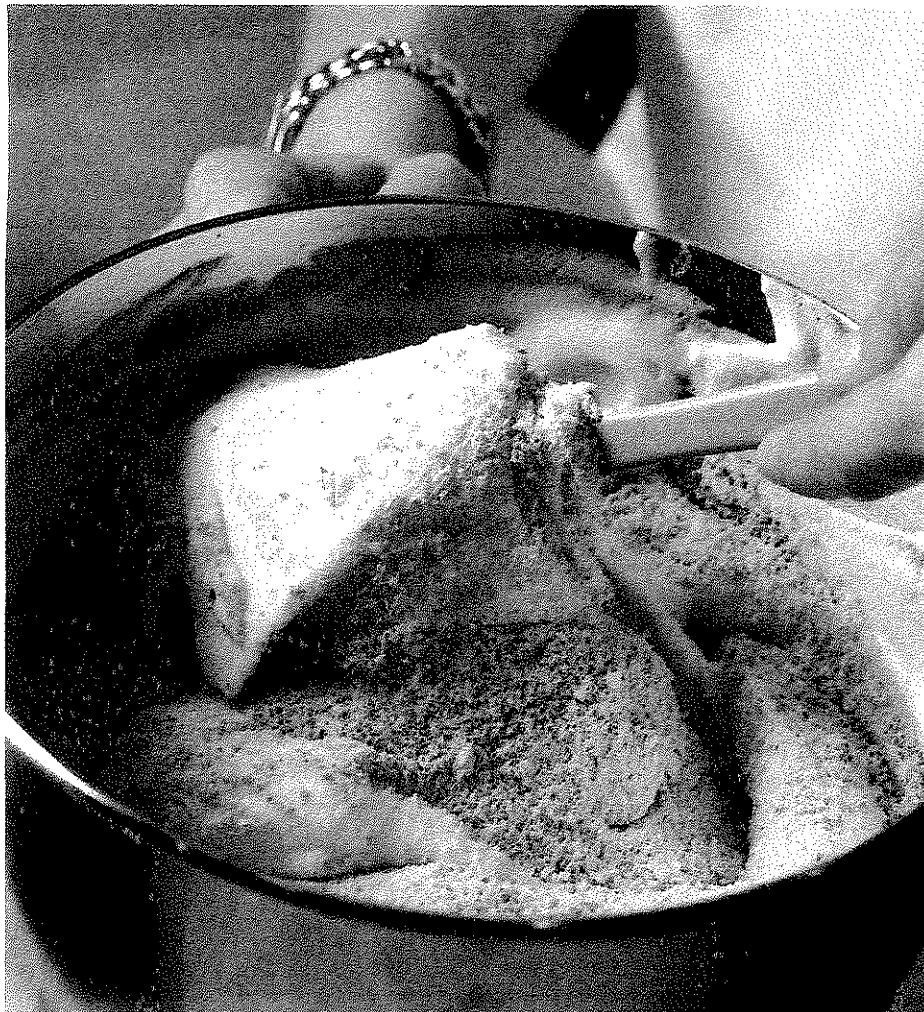
Why did my cake sink?

#### SOLVED:

A cake can sink in the center if it isn't cooked enough or if it's over-leavened. If the center of the cake is wet, it wasn't done; if the cake is cooked through, over-leavening is the likely culprit. Leaveners like baking soda and baking powder enlarge air bubbles that already exist in the batter. In a hot oven, the bubbles expand more, lifting and lightening the cake. But if there's too much leavener, the bubbles get too big, run into one another, float to the top of the batter, and burst. As a result, the cake sinks, and it's dense and heavy. For most recipes, 1 to 1¼ teaspoons of baking powder per cup of flour or ¼ teaspoon of baking soda per cup of flour is ideal.

*Continued on p. 12*





#### 5. CAKE QUANDARY: >

To sift or not to sift?

##### SOLVED:

While the labels on flour bags often state that the flour has been presifted, that sifting took place when the flour was manufactured, and you really have no idea how long ago that was. Flour compacts as it stands, so if you're measuring by volume, aerate the flour first by straining or sifting it before measuring. If you're measuring by weight and the recipe also calls for a leavener like baking soda or powder, weigh the flour first and then sift it with the leavener three times to thoroughly blend the ingredients.



#### < 6. CAKE QUANDARY:

What am I doing wrong when my cakes end up being tough, especially in the crust?

##### SOLVED:

Overmixing is usually the cause when a cake turns out tough or heavy. Mixing too much or too vigorously destroys the air bubbles that you've incorporated into the butter. Start the mixer on low speed and stop it when most of the flour has been mixed in, but you still see some unblended powder. At that point, take the bowl from the mixer and finish mixing by hand with a spatula. That way you can scrape the bottom of the bowl to get any little pockets of flour, but you won't add any unnecessary strokes.

#### 7. CAKE QUANDARY:

What's the best way to judge if a cake is done? Can I use a thermometer?

##### SOLVED:

You *can* actually check a cake for doneness by using an instant-read thermometer. Breads should reach an internal temperature of about 200°F. Cakes, however, are considered done at about 210°F. The higher proportion of sugar and liquid in cake recipes raises the temperature at which the structure of the cake is set.

That said, checking for doneness with a thermometer isn't necessarily the best use of science in the kitchen. First, not all cakes take kindly to being poked, especially with a thermometer that needs to be inserted halfway into the center of the cake. For example, the tender structure of sponge cakes (génoise, angel food, chiffon) is more dependent upon egg proteins than other cakes, and egg proteins are unique in that they are flexible even when fully cooked. Thus, these types of cakes are prone to collapse until they're fully cooled. Check them instead by gently pressing into the surface with your finger; it will feel firm when it is done.

Other cakes, such as basic layer cakes, pound cakes, and Bundt cakes, can withstand the prodding of an instant-read thermometer without collapsing. For these types of cakes, however, the simplest test is to insert a wooden skewer in the center of the cake; when you pull it out, a few crumbs should be attached. Metal skewers or the tip of a knife just aren't as effective: The still-wet batter can slip smoothly off the metal.

✓ **8. CAKE QUANDARY:**

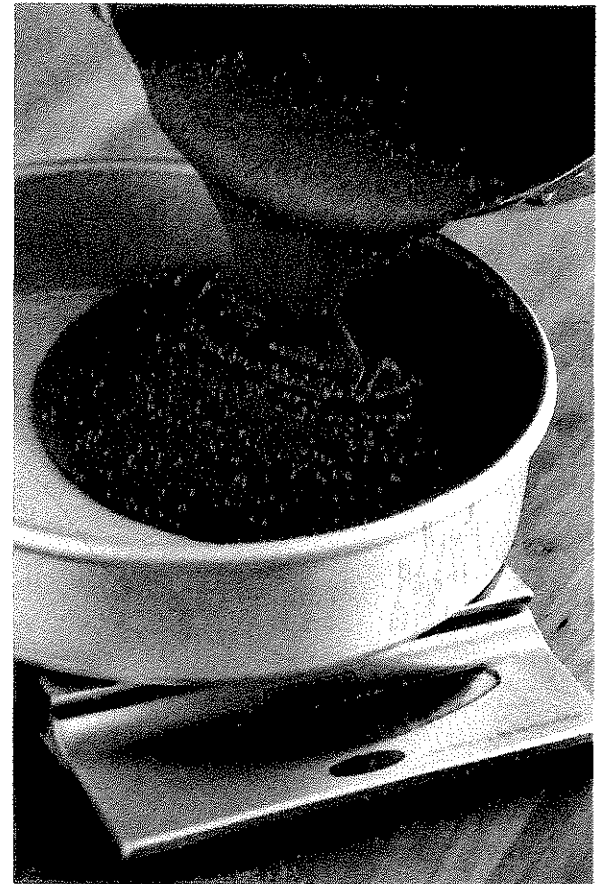
How can I retain the glossy sheen of a chocolate ganache-glazed cake after refrigeration?

**SOLVED:**

Ganache is a mixture of cream and chocolate, which, when poured warm over cakes, makes the ultimate rich chocolate glaze. Ganache naturally loses its shiny appearance as it cools and sets, and even more so when refrigerated, but there are several simple tricks you can use to preserve its attractive sheen.

If your cake requires refrigeration, be sure that it's refrigerator-cold (not frozen) before you glaze it, and return it immediately to the refrigerator (not the freezer) to set. Do this even if you plan to remove the cake from the fridge before serving to soften the texture. For the best sheen, let the ganache cool to a tepid temperature—90° to 100°F—and stir it before pouring it on the cake. If the ganache is too thick to pour at this temperature, thin it with warm cream. Once the ganache is poured over the cake, use as few spatula strokes as possible to spread the glaze; too much spatula work will dull the ganache as well.

**One last note:** If the dessert doesn't require refrigeration, don't chill it. Glaze it and let it sit at room temperature. This will give you the best-looking ganache of all.



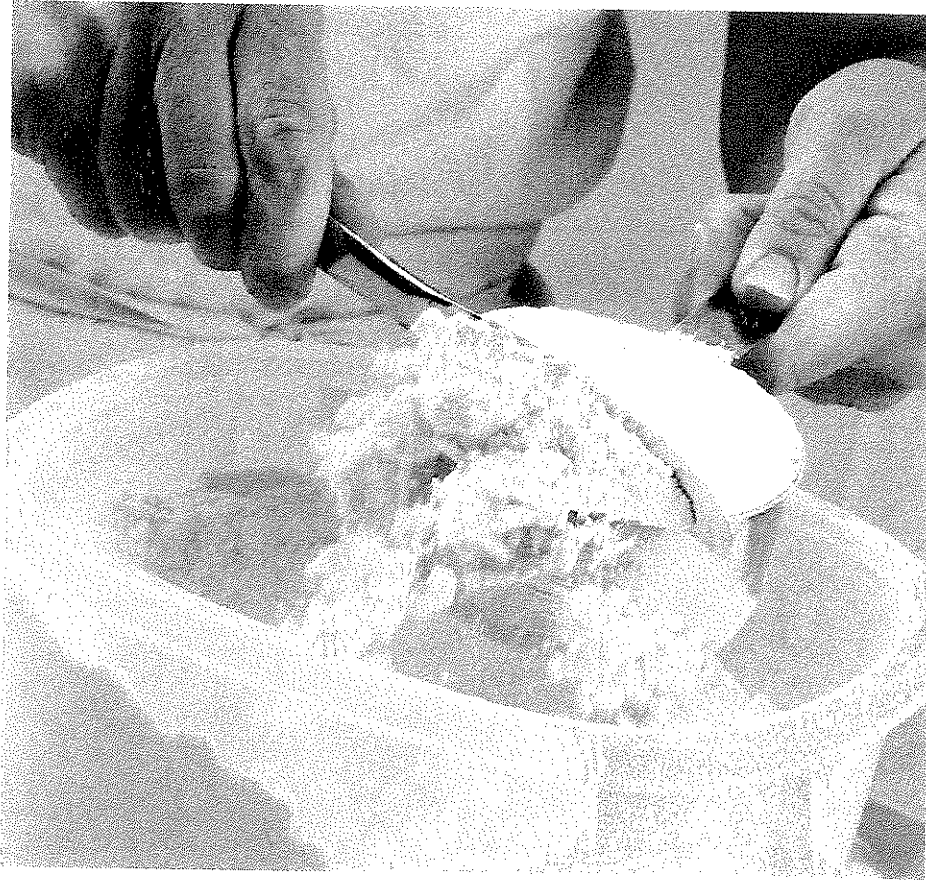
^ **9. CAKE QUANDARY:**

Sometimes when I bake a layer cake, I have a hard time getting the same amount of batter in the pans. As a result, my layers come out uneven. What should I do?

**SOLVED:**

The most accurate (and neatest) way to get equal amount of batter in each pan is to weigh the filled pans. If you don't have a kitchen scale, insert a toothpick or the tip of a knife into the batter to see if the height of the batter in each pan is equal. When dividing the batter among baking pans, be sure you don't fill them more than two-thirds full. Spread the batter in a circular motion using the back of an oversize soup spoon, applying pressure toward the tip while smoothing the batter across the surface. Don't use a rubber spatula, as it is too awkward for this job.

*Continued on p. 14*



< **11. CAKE QUANDARY:**  
How can I prevent my layer cakes from baking up domed? When I stack them, the whole cake is wobbly.

**SOLVED:**

One cause of domes is excessive flour in the batter, which absorbs too much liquid and creates a thicker, heavier batter. (Other causes include improperly calibrated, overly hot ovens and dark cake pans.) Too much flour in the batter is usually more a result of improper measuring than a bad recipe. Measuring by weight will give you the most accurate results, but if you need to measure by volume (either because you don't have a scale or because your recipe only gives volume measures), this is the method we recommend: Spoon the flour into dry measuring cups—liquid measures can't give you an accurate reading—and then level the flour by dragging a knife sideways across the top of the measuring cup. Never pack the flour down and never measure by dipping the cup into the flour. Dipping packs the flour, getting more in the cup, and skewing the balance of dry to wet ingredients in a recipe.

**10. CAKE QUANDARY:** >

Some recipes call for buttering the cake pan, then lining the bottom with a parchment circle. Isn't this redundant?

**SOLVED:**

In most cases, buttering the bottom of a baking pan (or greasing it with cooking spray) alone doesn't ensure a clean release, nor does greasing and flouring the pan. Using a parchment circle or a reusable silicone liner is as close to a guarantee as you can get that your cake won't stick. The coating of butter or spray also ensures that the parchment liner will stay in place—no sliding to one side and no curling up—when the batter is added and spread evenly into the pan.





#### ^ 12. CAKE QUANDARY:

Many of my cake recipes call for the butter to be at room temperature before it's mixed. Why can't I use it right from the fridge?

#### SOLVED:

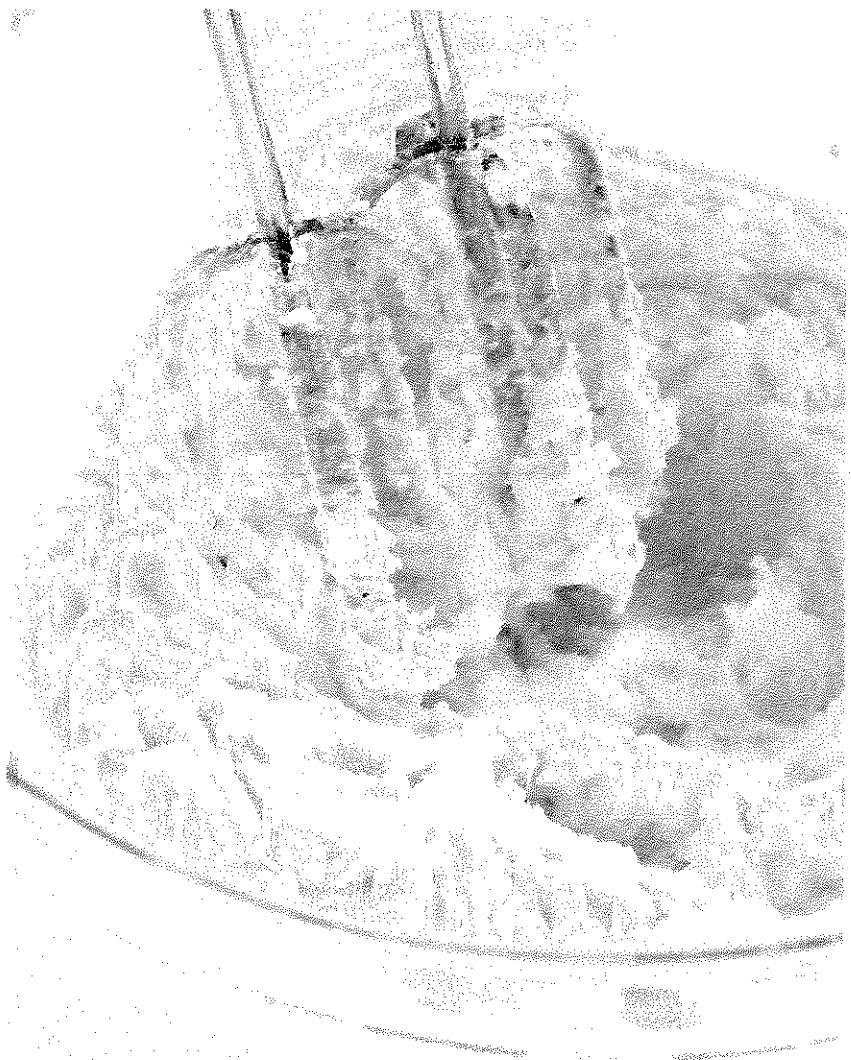
The purpose of creaming the butter is to beat tiny air bubbles into it. This will result in a light and airy finished cake. Butter holds air bubbles best at 68°F or just slightly cooler. In most homes, "room temperature" is actually warmer than that, and butter that warm won't be able to hold those pockets of air. So rather than store your butter at room temperature, let it sit on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes before mixing. The best way to tell if your butter is soft enough to beat is if it squishes when poked very lightly with a finger.

#### ✓ 13. CAKE QUANDARY:

My cake recipe calls for creaming the butter with the sugar, but how do I know when they're mixed properly? I did it for a few minutes, but my cake still came out heavy.

#### SOLVED:

Creaming the butter and sugar is an essential step for a light cake. It's when you use a hand or stand mixer to incorporate air into the batter. The sugar cuts into the butter, creating tiny air bubbles that get further expanded during baking by the baking powder or baking soda, and the heat of the oven. The most common mistake is to cream too little; you should continue beating the butter and the sugar until the mixture increases in volume, lightens to pale yellow, and the sugar granules no longer look obvious; this may take as long as five minutes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl once or twice during creaming. Stop before the butter looks curdled. Although undercreaming is more common, beating the sugar and butter too long will result in a mixture that's grainy and looks somewhat curdled. You can still use it, but the results won't be as light.

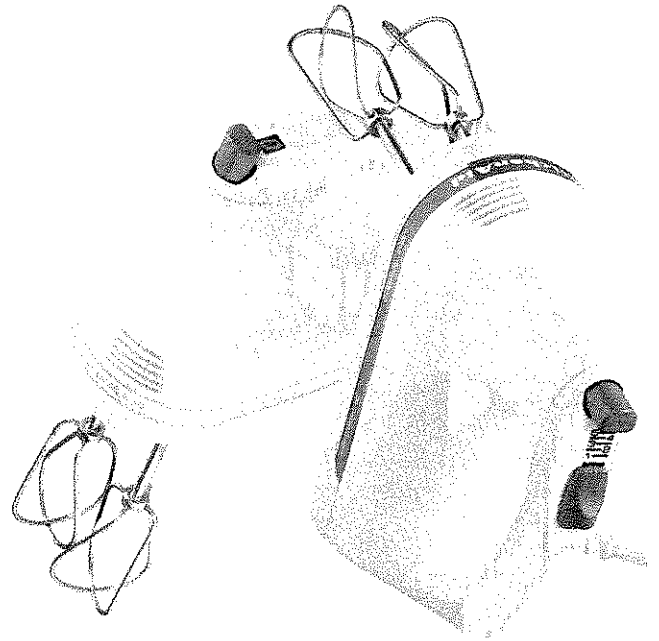


# Baker's Toolbox

HERE ARE SOME CAKE-BAKING BASICS that we won't bake without. You don't need a drawerful of gadgets to make most cakes, but these essentials are worth the dough.

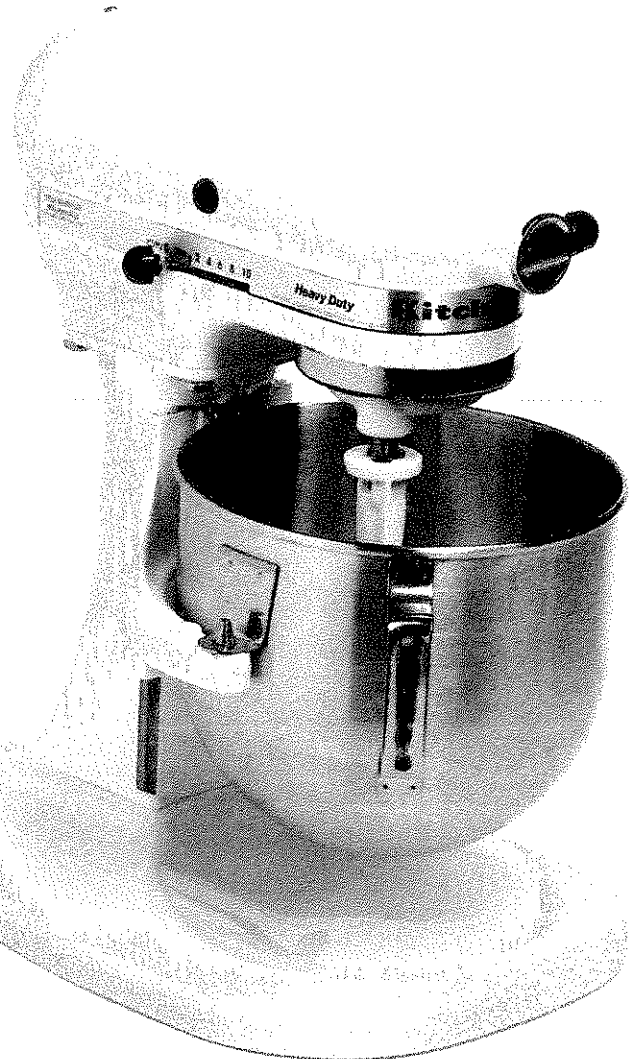
## HAND MIXER

Is a hand mixer really necessary if you already have a stand mixer? The answer is yes—the only way to whip frostings that cook over a hot water bath, like certain buttercreams, is with a hand mixer; plus, you simply can't beat its efficiency when small amounts of egg whites, cream, or batter are to be whipped. Look for a model that's lightweight but powerful, with a gentle low speed (to prevent spattering). To care for your model, resist the temptation to cream cold, hard butter with your hand mixer. It's one of the most common ways people burn out their machines. Instead, cut the cold butter into small pieces and let it sit out on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes. And never stick a spoon, spatula, or your hands in a mixing bowl while the mixer is running. It seems like an obvious point, but it ruins mixers all the time.



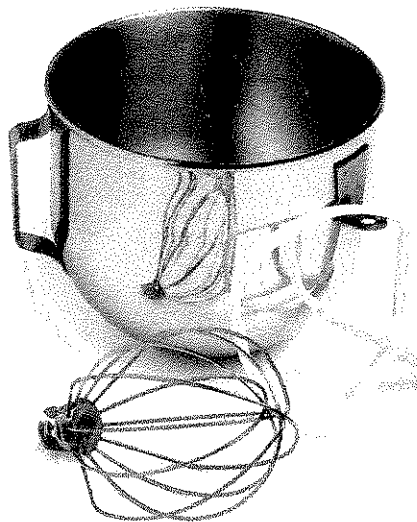
## STAND MIXER

You certainly don't need a stand mixer to whip cream or egg whites, or simply cream butter and sugar for batters, but having one makes all those tasks so much easier. Much more efficient than a hand mixer, a stand mixer leaves your hands free to add ingredients, start the next step of the recipe, clean up a bit, etc. Some great features to look for: wide-mouthed bowls, which make it easier to add ingredients and scrape the sides without brushing your hand against a batter-coated beater; sturdy all-metal construction; and good contact between the beaters and the bottom of the bowl. And, be sure the mixer will fit where you want it to go in your kitchen—no colliding with overhead cabinets when you tilt the head back.

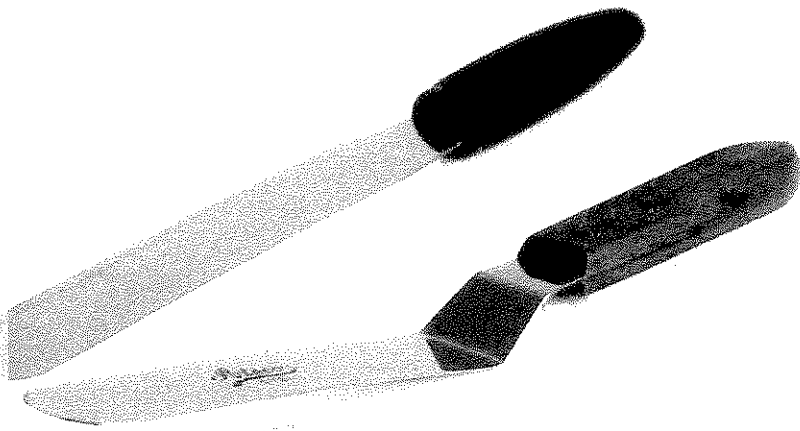


## MIXER ACCESSORIES

Invest in an extra stand mixer bowl, whip, and beater: you can beat a batter in one bowl and go straight to whipping cream in another.







### CAKE SPATULAS: OFFSET OR STRAIGHT?

When it comes to choosing a cake spatula, personal preference plays a big role—a spatula, like a knife, should feel comfortable in your hand and suit the task. An offset spatula (above right) is ideal for tasks like spreading batter in a cake pan or frosting the top of a cake, when you need a little distance from the surface to prevent batter or icing from getting on your knuckles. And a small or medium straight spatula works well for frosting the sides of a cake and for smoothing frosting to a level finish.



### DRY AND LIQUID MEASURING CUPS

Some measuring cups are made for measuring dry ingredients, and some are made for liquids. Maybe you already knew this, but if you didn't, it's time to stop using your liquid measuring cup to estimate flour amounts. You can't use one for the other without sacrificing accuracy. Spoon the ingredient into your dry measuring cup (as opposed to dipping the cup into the ingredient) before leveling it with a straight edge, like a table knife. You'll get a more consistent result this way.

### KITCHEN SCALE

Though most of us learned to bake with measuring cups and spoons, weighing dry ingredients is the best way to know exactly what's in the mixing bowl (see Test Kitchen, p. 109). Measuring ingredients by weight is efficient and accurate. Depending on whether it has been sifted, tapped down, or compacted, a cup of flour can vary in weight by 2 ounces or more—a substantial difference, especially when you're baking. Weighing allows bakers to measure precisely, right into the mixing bowl. Cleanup is easier too: no swept-off ingredients to wipe up, no cups to wash. Look for good capacity and an easy "tare"—a simple way to re-set the scale to zero when you've placed a mixing bowl or cup on top of it—along with fine graduations to ensure accuracy.

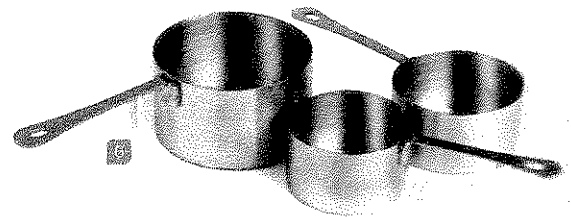
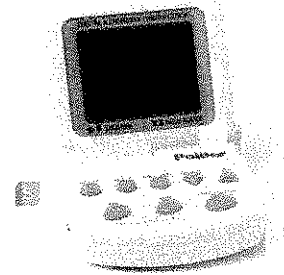
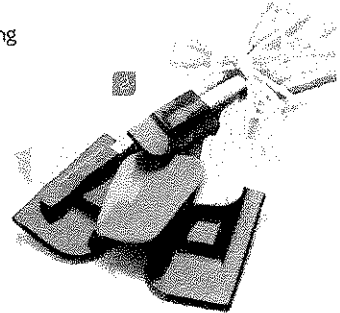
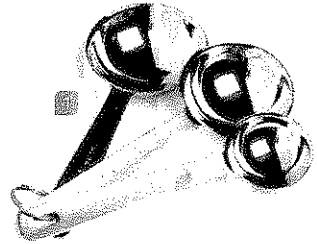


For more baking and kitchen tools go to [FineCooking.com/buy-it](http://FineCooking.com/buy-it).

## Bells and whistles

Though not considered essentials, these tools are awfully nice to have around.

**Sets of odd-size measuring spoons (1) and cups (6)**, like  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon or  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups, make measuring ingredients more efficient. **Heat-resistant spatulas (2)** are useful for folding or scraping batter, and won't melt if they're left resting in the double-boiler. A good-quality set of **French pastry brushes (3)** help with making sugar syrups, glazing cake layers, and coating pans with melted butter. An **instant-read digital thermometer (4)** lets you check the temperature of a meringue, custard, or cake. A **digital cooking timer (5)** will help you keep track of multiple items.



## butter pound cake

Pound cakes were traditionally made from one pound each of flour, sugar, butter, and eggs. An easy formula to remember, but it didn't produce the fabulous results you'll get from this revised version.

**Serves 12 to 16**

- 10 oz. (1¼ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan**
- 10¼ oz. (2½ cups) cake flour or 11 oz. (2½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for the pan**
- 1½ tsp. baking powder**
- ½ tsp. table salt**
- 1¼ cups granulated sugar**
- 2 large egg yolks, at room temperature**
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature**
- ¾ cup whole milk, at room temperature**
- 1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract**

**Position a rack** in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 12-cup Bundt pan, dust the pan with flour, and tap out the excess. In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt until evenly combined.

**In the bowl** of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and the sugar at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes.

**On low speed**, beat in the yolks until smooth. Stop the mixer and scrape the bowl and the paddle. With the mixer running on medium-low speed, add the whole eggs, one at a time, mixing for at least 20 seconds after each addition. Stop the mixer and scrape the bowl and paddle again.

**With the mixer** running on the lowest speed, add half of the flour mixture and mix just to combine, add the milk and mix until combined, and then add the remaining flour mixture and mix just until combined.

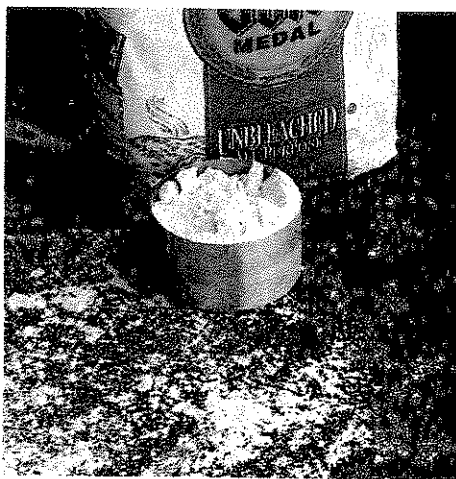
**Scrape** the bowl one last time, add the vanilla extract, and mix at medium speed until the batter is smooth and fluffy, 20 to 30 seconds. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread it evenly. Run a knife through the batter and tap the pan against the counter to dislodge trapped air.

**Bake** until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it, 45 to 55 minutes.

**Let cool** in the pan for 10 to 15 minutes and then invert onto a wire rack to cool completely. The cake will keep at room temperature for 3 days.

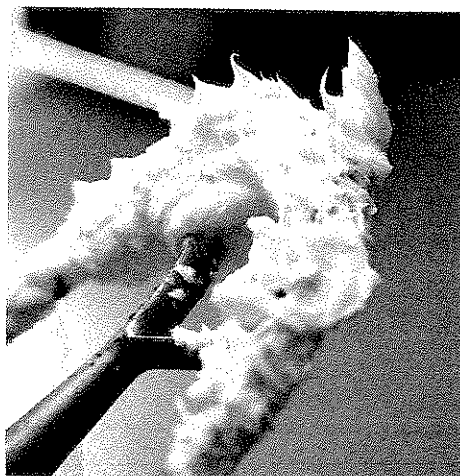
## Tip Sheet

3 secrets to perfect pound cake.



### The difference in flours.

The flour you use can noticeably affect your finished pound cake. Use cake flour for a taller cake with fluffier texture. All-purpose flour will give you a denser, moister cake with a texture closer to that of quick bread.



### Creaming depends on softened butter.

Beating butter and sugar together creates air bubbles in the cake batter (which gives the finished cake a light texture). For maximum bubbles, the butter must be solid but pliable, ideally at 65°F. Be sure to take your butter out of the fridge for 30 minutes before creaming.



### A Bundt pan ensures a better cake.

Traditionally, pound cakes are baked in loaf pans, but this version has a batter with more moisture and less protein structure, so it won't rise as high or form that distinctive camelback hump if baked in a loaf pan. Baking in a Bundt pan gives the batter better support and the hold in the center means the edges won't be dry by the time the center of the cake is set.

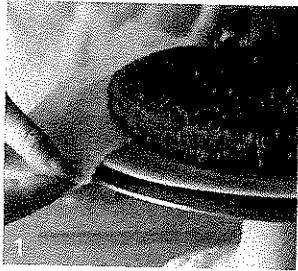
## TECHNIQUE

# The icing on the cake

Knowing how to frost a layer cake like the one on p. 87 can be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it's not hard and your friends will be impressed. On the other hand, everyone will want you to make them a birthday cake.

### Position and level your cake

Set a cake plate on a rotating cake stand or lazy Susan. Position your first layer of cake upside down on the plate. If necessary, level the cake layer with a long serrated knife. Slide strips of parchment or waxed paper under the edge of the cake to keep the plate clean as you frost.

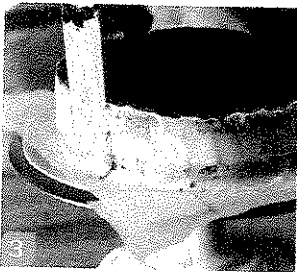


### Fill the layers

Gently brush any crumbs from the cake. Using an offset spatula, spread the recommended amount of frosting across the surface of the cake in an even layer (don't worry about getting the surface perfectly smooth).

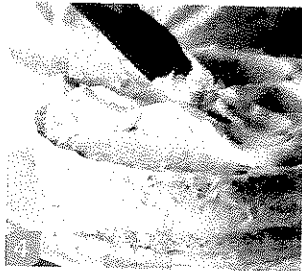


Place the second cake layer on the frosting, aligning the layers in a perfectly vertical column. If using split layers that were cut unevenly, match up the layers so the cake stays flat. If the cake is three or more layers, continue to fill between the layers, ending with the top layer unfrosted.



### Seal in the crumbs

Frosting the cake is easier if you first seal the crumbs in a thin layer of frosting, called a crumb coat. With an offset spatula, spread about 1/2 cup of frosting in a thin, even layer all over the cake. Smooth any frosting protruding between the layers and use that extra frosting as part of the crumb coat. It's fine if the cake is still visible through the thin crumb coat. Refrigerate the cake to firm up the crumb coat, about 20 minutes.



### Finish with style

Spread the remaining frosting evenly over the chilled crumb coat. Once the cake is frosted, you can decorate the surface in a variety of ways, using a spoon or offset spatula to create swoops or stripes. If you prefer a smooth look, dip the spatula in hot water, wipe it dry, and hold it against the surface as you rotate the cake. Keep dipping the spatula in water and wiping it dry.

## EQUIPMENT

### Why you need a kitchen scale

Baking is just as much a science as an art. A delicate, fluffy cake is the result of many chemical reactions, and when one element is off, the result can fall flat—literally. A small digital kitchen scale truly is a baker's best friend. Here's why:

**Measuring ingredients.** Depending on what scooping method you use, a leveled cup measure can hold anywhere from 3 1/2 to 5 1/2 oz. of flour. A fluffy ingredient like powdered sugar or cocoa can be even more variable. Weighing these ingredients eliminates inconsistencies. It's also much faster and makes for less dishwashing; rather than measuring one cup at a time in a cup measure, you can weigh your ingredients right in the mixing bowl.

**Dividing batter evenly.** A scale is also helpful if you need to divide batter between two or more baking pans, as in the Triple Lemon Layer Cake, on p. 103. Weighing the batter ensures that each layer is uniform, both in quantity and in baking time.

Even if you don't do a lot of baking, a scale is a worthwhile investment. You'll find yourself pulling it out again and again to weigh all sorts of things, like 12 oz. of pasta, a pound of potatoes, or even a letter that seems a little heavy for regular postage.

## INGREDIENT

### Can't find any buttermilk?

Cultured buttermilk lends moistness and a light tanginess to cakes, like the Buttermilk Cake on p. 32. Like regular milk, buttermilk comes in whole, low-fat, and nonfat varieties. Whole-fat buttermilk is readily available in the southeastern United States, because it's a popular ingredient in that region. But in other areas, the selection is usually limited to low-fat and nonfat buttermilk.

Fortunately, all buttermilks are interchangeable in baking. With higher fat buttermilk, the results may be slightly richer, but because most baked goods get plenty of fat from butter or oil, the difference is hard to detect.

In some places, buttermilk of any kind can be hard to find. If you live in one of these areas, try one of the following substitutions—the results won't be quite the same as with buttermilk, but they all work in a pinch.

### Try one of these substitutions:

#### Dried buttermilk powder

You can't reconstitute it to make buttermilk, but it's a handy baking ingredient. You add the powder to the dry ingredients and water to the wet ingredients before mixing (check the package for specifics). At the market, look for dried buttermilk either in the baking section or near other powdered milk.



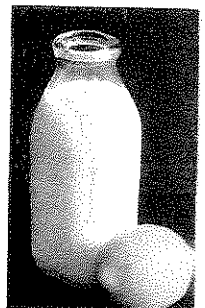
#### Soured milk

Add 1 Tbs. lemon juice or white vinegar to 1 cup whole, low-fat, or nonfat milk and let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes.



#### Yogurt

Substitute whole-milk or low-fat plain yogurt, thinned if necessary with milk or water to the consistency of buttermilk.



## TIP

## Go break an egg

Whenever you need to crack open an egg, rap it on a flat surface, like the counter, rather than on the rim of your bowl. Breaking eggs on a bowl rim causes more shell shatter and sometimes drives tiny shell shards—the kind that can be infuriatingly hard to fish out—into the egg white. If you crack your eggs on the counter, shell-fragments should appear in your bowl far less often.

## INGREDIENT

## Buttercream 101

To many home cooks, buttercream cake icing is butter whipped with confectioners' sugar and flavoring.

To pastry chefs, buttercream usually means butter whipped with meringue or beaten egg yolks. There are three basic types of egg-based buttercreams, all of which are lighter and more luxurious than the often gritty and overly sweet confectioners' sugar version.

**Swiss buttercream starts with Swiss meringue:**

Egg whites and sugar are heated together in a mixing bowl over a hot-water bath until the sugar dissolves, then they're whipped to stiff peaks. Next, butter and flavorings are whipped in. Swiss buttercream is quick and easy to make, but it's denser and less stable than Italian buttercream.

**The lightest and sweetest of the buttercreams,**

**Italian buttercream**, is based on Italian meringue, made by whipping softball-stage (234° to 240°F) sugar syrup into already-whipped egg whites, effectively cooking and stabilizing the whites. Once the meringue cools a bit, soft butter and flavorings are whipped in.

**Decadent French buttercream** uses the same

technique as Italian buttercream except that it begins with beating the sugar syrup into whipped whole eggs or whole eggs plus extra yolks, rather than using just egg whites. In addition to giving it a yellow hue, the yolks make French buttercream richer and heavier, in contrast to the billowy texture and snowy white color of Italian buttercream.

## TIP

Check it early,  
check it often

Lots of variables come into play whenever you bake. Oven performance varies, baking pans are made of different materials, and ingredients differ, too. All these things can cause slight variations in the way batters and doughs behave in the oven, and that's why we give specific doneness clues as well as time ranges in our recipes. Just to be on the safe side, though, it's good to get in the habit of checking on your cakes and cookies a few minutes before the recipe indicates. And once they're getting close to done, check on them often; some baked goods can go from underdone to overdone in a flash.

## TECHNIQUE

## How to unmold a cheesecake

If you've used a springform pan, unmolding can be as easy as removing the ring.

If you want to remove the bottom as well, you'll need to invert the cheesecake twice (if you've used a cake pan instead of a springform, you'll have no choice but to do this). If this is your plan, it's a good idea to line the bottom of the greased pan with a circle of greased kitchen parchment before baking.

Before unmolding the sides and bottom, be sure the cheesecake is thoroughly chilled (at least six hours in the refrigerator). Have ready a serving plate and another flat plate that's at least as wide as the springform and covered with plastic wrap. Remove the ring following the photos at right. Set the plate with plastic wrap on top of the cheesecake and carefully invert the pan. Heat the base of the springform with a hot, damp cloth or a hair dryer, and lift it off. Peel away the parchment, if used. Set the serving plate lightly on the bottom of the cheesecake (which is now facing up), and reinvert the cake. Lift off the plastic-wrapped plate. If the cheesecake was baked without a crust, you may need to smooth the sides with a metal spatula.

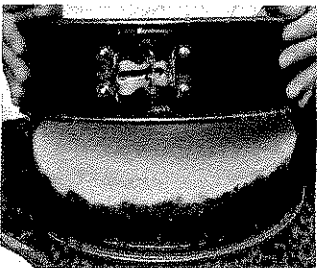
To cut neat slices, use a sharp, thin-bladed knife dipped in hot water (shake off excess drops) between each slice. For a cheesecake without a crust, a piece of dental floss, held taut, also works (you'll need to cut across the diameter of the cake).



Wipe a hot, damp cloth around the outside of the ring (or use a hair dryer).



Run a metal spatula or a thin knife inside the ring.



Release and gently loosen the ring and then lift it off.