



The Kitchen Notebook

a home baker's companion

Before We Preheat the Oven

Welcome to The Kitchen Notebook.

I'm so happy you're here.

If you downloaded this Starter Kit, chances are you love baking as much as I do, or maybe you're just getting started and looking for a little guidance.

Either way, you're in the right place.

The Kitchen Notebook was created with one simple goal: to help home bakers feel more confident in the kitchen.

Inside these pages you'll find the references I reach for over and over again, from baking conversions and ingredient substitutions to practical tips I've learned through recipe testing. These aren't just things I've read, they're things I've learned by mixing, measuring, testing, adjusting, and sometimes starting all over again.

I don't believe baking has to be complicated or intimidating. I believe the best recipes come from understanding the little details that make a big difference.

My hope is that this notebook becomes something you come back to often. Print it, write notes in the margins, tuck it into your favorite cookbook, and let it grow with you as your confidence grows.

Thank you for letting me be a small part of your baking journey.

Now...

Let's preheat the oven.

Happy baking,

ellie guerrero

The Kitchen Notebook



10 Lessons my kitchen has taught me

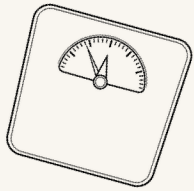
These aren't just baking tips. They're lessons I've learned through years of baking, recipe testing, and plenty of trial and error. Some of them came after a recipe failed. Others completely changed the way I bake. My hope is that they help you skip a few mistakes and bake with a little more confidence.

01 Don't be afraid of salted butter



One of the biggest changes I've made in my baking is switching from unsalted to salted butter for many of my recipes.

The small amount of salt helps balance sweetness and enhances flavors like vanilla, chocolate, and fruit without making desserts taste salty. While some recipes still call for unsalted butter, I've found that salted butter often creates a richer, more balanced flavor in everyday baking.



02 Measure by weight whenever possible

Baking is a science, and accuracy matters.

Measuring ingredients by weight gives you much more consistent results than measuring by volume. One cup of flour can vary depending on how it's scooped, but 120 grams will always be 120 grams.

The best part? My digital kitchen scale cost around \$10, and it's still one of the best baking investments I've ever made.

03 Room temperature ingredients really do matter

Room temperature ingredients combine more easily, creating smoother batters and better emulsions.

Butter traps air more efficiently, eggs incorporate more evenly, and everything mixes together the way the recipe intended.

If a recipe calls for room temperature ingredients, there's a good reason.



04 If you love thick, chewy cookies, try baking at 375°F



After plenty of cookie testing, I've found that baking many of my cookies at 375°F gives me the texture I love most.

The edges become beautifully golden while the centers stay soft and chewy. The cookies spread a little less, creating a thicker cookie with more texture in every bite.

Not every cookie recipe is the same, but if you're after bakery style cookies, it's worth trying.



05 Use an oven thermometer

If your oven is anything like mine, you can't always trust the temperature on the dial.

My oven is a complete dinosaur, and it can be off by as much as 25 degrees. An inexpensive oven thermometer lets me know the actual temperature inside the oven, which makes a huge difference in baking.

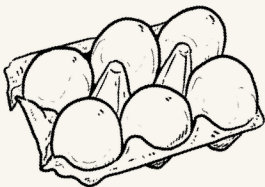
06 Don't forget about residual heat



This is something I ignored for years.

Even after you remove baked goods from the oven, they continue cooking from the heat they've already absorbed.

That's why I often pull delicate baked goods out about a minute before I think they're completely done. The residual heat finishes the job while helping prevent overbaking.



07 Add eggs one at a time

It may seem like a small step, but it makes a big difference.

Adding eggs one at a time gives each egg a chance to fully incorporate before adding the next one. This creates a smoother batter and a better emulsion, which leads to more consistent results. Patience pays off here.

08 Read the entire recipe before you start



This might be the easiest baking tip to follow—and one of the most important.

Before you preheat the oven, read the entire recipe, including the notes, substitutions, and equipment you'll need.

You'll thank yourself when you realize you have enough buttermilk before you've already mixed the dry ingredients.



09 Check the expiration dates on your leaveners

Baking powder and baking soda don't last forever.

As they age, they lose their ability to properly lift cakes, cookies, and quick breads. Even the best recipe can fall flat if your leaveners aren't fresh.

I make it a habit to check expiration dates before starting a new recipe.

10 Sift your dry ingredients whenever possible



Sifting flour, cocoa powder, powdered sugar, and other dry ingredients helps remove lumps and distributes everything more evenly throughout the batter.

It only takes a minute, but it creates smoother batters, more delicate textures, and beautifully mixed doughs.

It's one of those little steps that's easy to skip but worth doing.

Inside my pantry

People often ask what ingredients I always keep on hand, and the truth is... this pantry wasn't built overnight.

Every ingredient on these pages earned its place because I reached for it again and again while developing recipes for my family.

If you're just getting started, don't feel like you need everything on this list today. Build your pantry one recipe at a time. Buy the ingredients you'll use often, learn what they do, and let your pantry grow with your confidence.

These are the ingredients that have become staples in my kitchen, and I hope they become helpful in yours too.

flours

All Purpose Flour

Why I keep it: If I could only choose one flour, this would be it. It's incredibly versatile and works beautifully for cookies, cakes, muffins, quick breads, pie crusts, and so much more.

Bread Flour

Why I keep it: The higher protein content creates stronger gluten, making it perfect for breads, pizza dough, bagels, and recipes where I want a chewier texture.

Cake Flour

Why I keep it: When I want extra-soft cakes, cupcakes, or delicate crumb textures, cake flour is my first choice.

sweeteners

Granulated Sugar

Why I keep it: The foundation of most baking recipes and one of the ingredients I reach for almost every day.

Light Brown Sugar

Why I keep it: Adds moisture, softness, and a subtle caramel flavor that makes cookies especially irresistible.



Dark Brown Sugar

Why I keep it: Perfect when I want a deeper molasses flavor in cookies, bars, gingerbread, or spice cakes.

Powdered Sugar

Why I keep it: Essential for frostings, glazes, whipped cream, and that final dusting that makes desserts feel extra special.

Honey

Why I keep it: Adds natural sweetness and helps keep baked goods soft and moist.

Molasses

Why I keep it: A little goes a long way in adding richness and depth to recipes like gingerbread and spice cookies.



refrigerator staples

Salted Butter

Why I keep it: My favorite everyday butter. I love the way it balances sweetness and enhances flavors like vanilla, chocolate, and fruit.

Eggs

Why I keep it: Eggs provide structure, richness, moisture, and help bring everything together.

Whole Milk

Why I keep it: A dependable ingredient for cakes, muffins, pancakes, and enriched doughs.

Heavy Cream

Why I keep it: Perfect for whipped cream, ganache, sauces, and adding richness to desserts.

Cream Cheese

Why I keep it: One of my favorite ingredients for frostings, cheesecakes, bars, and creamy fillings.

Sour Cream

Why I keep it: Adds moisture and tenderness while giving cakes an incredibly soft crumb.

Greek Yogurt

Why I keep it: A wonderful substitute for sour cream in many recipes while adding moisture and protein.

flavor builders

Vanilla Extract

Why I keep it: My everyday choice for cakes, cookies, brownies, muffins, and quick breads.

Ground Cinnamon

Why I keep it: Warm, cozy, and one of my favorite spices for cookies, cakes, muffins, and breakfast bakes.

Nutmeg

Why I keep it: Just a pinch adds warmth and depth to spice cakes, pumpkin recipes, and custards.

Espresso Powder

Why I keep it: A tiny amount deepens chocolate flavor without making desserts taste like coffee.

Cocoa Powder

Why I keep it: My favorite choice for rich, dark chocolate desserts with a smooth flavor.

baking essentials

Baking Powder

Why I keep it: Gives baked goods their lift and helps create light, tender textures.

Baking Soda

Why I keep it: Essential for cookies, quick breads, and recipes that use acidic ingredients.

Cornstarch

Why I keep it: Helps create softer cookies, silky fillings, and beautifully thick sauces.

Fine Sea Salt

Why I keep it: One of the simplest ways to make every other flavor shine.

Instant Yeast

Why I keep it: Perfect for breads, cinnamon rolls, pizza dough, and enriched dough recipes.

Specialty ingredients

Milk Powder

Why I keep it: One of my favorite baking secrets for adding richness, chewiness, and deeper flavor to cookies and enriched doughs.

Coconut Milk Powder

Why I keep it: Adds a gentle coconut flavor without adding extra liquid to recipes.

Rum Extract

Why I keep it: Just a small amount brings warmth and depth to baked goods without tasting like alcohol.

Almond Extract

Why I keep it: A little goes a long way. I love using it to enhance fruit desserts and buttery pastries.

Baking conversions made simple

Whether you're following a family recipe, trying a recipe from another country, or scaling a recipe to fit your needs, having a reliable conversion chart can make baking feel much less intimidating. Instead of stopping to search for measurements every few minutes, you'll have the most common conversions right at your fingertips. While measuring cups and spoons are convenient, baking is a science where precision makes all the difference. Measuring ingredients by weight, especially flour, sugar, and cocoa powder, provides far more consistent results than measuring by volume. A cup of flour can vary significantly depending on how it's scooped, packed, or leveled, but 120 grams will always be 120 grams.

If you have a kitchen scale, I encourage you to use it whenever possible. It's one of the simplest ways to improve your baking, reduce dishes, and create recipes that turn out beautifully every single time.



When baking, grams are your best friend. Measuring by weight is more accurate and gives more consistent results than measuring by volume.

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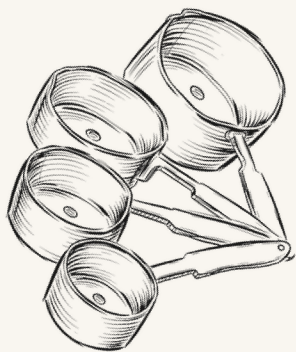
Volume Conversion (US standard)

US Measure	Metric
$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp	0.6 ml
$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp	1.25 ml
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp	2.5 ml
$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp	3.75 ml
1 tsp	5 ml
2 tsp	10 ml
1 tbsp	15 ml
2 tbsp	30 ml

US Measure	Metric
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	60 ml
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	80 ml
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	120 ml
$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	160 ml
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup	180 ml
1 cup	240 ml
2 cups	480 ml
4 cups	960 ml (1 quart)

Weight Conversion

Weight	Metric	Weight	Metric
$\frac{1}{4}$ oz	7 g	4 oz	113 g
$\frac{1}{2}$ oz	14 g	8 oz	227 g
1 oz	28 g	12 oz	340 g
2 oz	57 g	16 oz	454 g (1 lb)



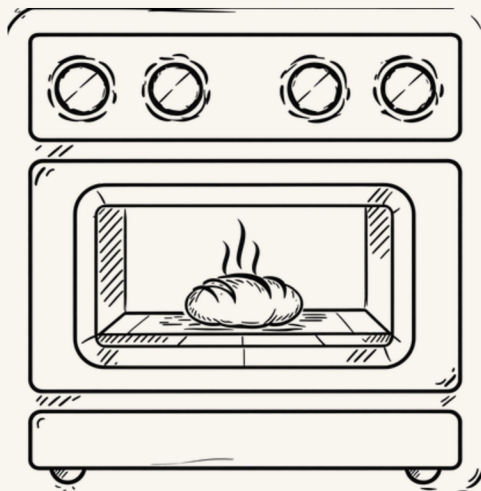
Cups to Grams

Ingredient	1 Cup
All-purpose flour	120 g
Bread flour	125 g
Cake flour	114 g
Granulated sugar	200 g
Brown sugar (packed)	220 g
Powdered sugar	120 g
Cocoa powder	85 g
Butter	227 g

Ingredient	1 Cup
Vegetable oil	218 g
Milk	240 g
Heavy cream	240 g
Greek yogurt	245 g
Sour cream	230 g
Honey	340 g
Chocolate Chips	170 g
Peanut butter	258 g

Oven Temperature Conversion

Fahrenheit	Celsius
250°F	120°C
275°F	135°C
300°F	150°C
325°F	165°C
350°F	175°C



Fahrenheit	Celsius
375°F	190°C
400°F	205°C
425°F	220°C
450°F	230°C
475°F	245°C

Common baking pan sizes

Pan	Capacity
Loaf pan	$8\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in
Standard loaf	9×5 in
Square pan	8×8 in
Square pan	9×9 in
Round cake	8 in



Pan	Capacity
Round cake	9 in
Muffin pan	12 cups
Mini muffin	24 cups
9×13 pan	3 qt

Baker's Substitution Guide

We've all been there, you've gathered your ingredients, preheated the oven, and then realized you're missing one key item. Before you give up on baking, check this guide!

While some ingredients play an important role in the structure and texture of baked goods, many can be substituted with common pantry staples.

Keep in mind that substitutions may slightly change the flavor, texture, or appearance of the final bake, but they'll often save the day when you're in a pinch.

Dairy

Instead of...	Try...
Buttermilk	1 cup milk + 1 tbsp lemon juice or white vinegar
Whole milk	2% milk or plant-based milk (recipe dependent)
Heavy cream	Half-and-half + 2 tbsp melted butter
Sour cream	Plain Greek yogurt
Cream cheese	Mascarpone (for some recipes)

Eggs

Instead of...	Try...
1 large egg	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup unsweetened applesauce
1 large egg	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup mashed banana
1 large egg	Flax egg (1 tbsp ground flaxseed + 3 tbsp water)
Egg wash	Milk or heavy cream

Flour

Instead of...	Try...
Cake flour	1 cup all-purpose flour minus 2 tbsp + 2 tbsp cornstarch
Self-rising flour	1 cup all-purpose flour + 1½ tsp baking powder + ¼ tsp salt
Bread flour	All-purpose flour (slightly softer texture)

Sweeteners

Instead of...	Try...
Brown sugar	White sugar + 1 tbsp molasses
Honey	Maple syrup
Maple syrup	Honey
Corn syrup	Honey or golden syrup (depending on recipe)

Leavening Agents

Instead of...	Try...
Baking powder	¼ tsp baking soda + ½ tsp cream of tartar
Baking soda	No perfect substitute, best to use baking soda when called for
Cream of tartar	Lemon juice or white vinegar (when appropriate)

Fats

Instead of...	Try...
Butter	Margarine (for many recipes)
Vegetable oil	Canola oil
Vegetable oil	Melted coconut oil
Unsalted butter	Salted butter (reduce added salt by $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp per cup)

Please Note

Not all swaps are created equal! If you're making cookies or cakes, substitutions may slightly change the texture. If you're decorating a cake or testing a new recipe, stick to the original ingredients whenever possible for the most reliable results.

Things I've learned along the way.

I haven't always known the "right" way to do things in the kitchen. Most of what I've learned came from recipes that didn't turn out the way I hoped, cookies that spread too much, cakes that sank, and moments where I found myself wondering, "What did I do wrong?" Every mistake taught me something, though. These are a few of the lessons that changed the way I bake, and hopefully they'll save you a little frustration along the way.

More flour isn't the answer to sticky dough.

Whenever cookie dough felt sticky, I'd add more flour. Sometimes that worked... and sometimes it gave me dry cookies. More often than not, the dough simply needed time to chill.

Don't rush butter.

I melted butter in the microwave because I was impatient, only to realize later I needed softened butter instead. Now I plan ahead whenever I can. The right consistency makes a bigger difference than I ever expected.

Every ingredient has a purpose.

I used to think skipping salt or reducing sugar wouldn't matter much. Then I learned that ingredients don't just add flavor, they help create structure, moisture, browning, and balance. Understanding why an ingredient is there has made me a much better baker.

Practice builds confidence.

Not every recipe turns out perfectly the first time, and that's okay. Every batch teaches you something. The recipes I'm most proud of today exist because I was willing to learn from the ones that didn't.

Keep notes.

Some of my favorite recipe improvements happened because I scribbled a note in the margin: "Bake 2 minutes less," "Add more lemon zest," or "Use chilled butter." Your future self will thank you.

Enjoy the process.

Some of my favorite memories weren't the perfect desserts, they were the messy counters, the laughter, and the recipes shared with the people I love. Baking isn't about perfection. It's about creating something with your hands and sharing it with others. The best bakers aren't the ones who never make mistakes, they're the ones who keep learning from them. I hope these lessons help you feel a little more confident in your own kitchen, and remind you that every great baker started exactly where you are: learning one recipe at a time.

The tools I reach for again and again

One of the questions I get asked most often is, "What tools do I actually need to start baking?"

The truth is, you don't need a kitchen full of expensive gadgets to bake something delicious. Over the years, I've learned that a handful of reliable tools can make baking easier, more enjoyable, and much more consistent. These are the tools I reach for again and again. Some are simple, some are inexpensive, and all of them have earned a permanent spot in my kitchen because they make a real difference.

Digital Kitchen Scale

If I could recommend just one tool, this would be it. Measuring ingredients by weight gives you more consistent results, especially when baking with flour. It's affordable, easy to use, and one of the best investments you can make.

Silicone Spatula

Perfect for scraping every last bit of batter from the bowl, folding ingredients gently, and mixing without waste. I honestly don't know how I baked without one.

Cookie Scoop

Not because it looks professional, but because it keeps every cookie the same size so they bake evenly. It's one of those tools you don't realize you need until you have one.

Measuring Cups and Spoons

A good set of measuring cups and spoons is a kitchen staple. Even though I prefer weighing ingredients whenever possible, they're still essential for liquids, spices, and smaller measurements.

Wire Cooling Rack

Cooling baked goods on a wire rack helps air circulate underneath, preventing soggy bottoms and allowing cookies, cakes, and breads to cool evenly.

Whisk

A simple whisk is one of the hardest-working tools in my kitchen. Whether I'm combining dry ingredients or mixing a quick glaze, it's always within reach.

Mixing Bowls

Having a few mixing bowls in different sizes makes baking so much easier. I use them for everything from measuring ingredients ahead of time to mixing batters and frostings.

Parchment Paper

Cleanup is easier, cookies bake more evenly, and sticking becomes a thing of the past. I almost always line my baking sheets before they go into the oven.

Bench Scraper

One of the most underrated kitchen tools. It's perfect for dividing dough, transferring chopped ingredients, cleaning flour off the counter, and keeping my workspace organized.

Instant Read Thermometer

Whether I'm checking bread, caramel, or butter temperature, this little tool removes the guesswork and helps me bake with confidence.

Your recipe notes

Some of my favorite recipes didn't become favorites the very first time I made them. They became favorites because I kept notes along the way. Maybe the cookies were perfect with two extra minutes in the oven. Maybe the cake needed a little more vanilla, or the frosting was even better with a pinch of salt. Those little discoveries are what make a recipe truly yours.

Use these pages to jot down ideas, adjustments, family favorites, or anything you want to remember the next time you bake. Years from now, I hope you'll flip back through these notes and remember not just what you baked, but who you shared it with.

After all, the best recipes aren't just written, they're lived.

Recipe Name: _____

Date: _____

Source: _____



Rating

What did I change?

Baking Notes

Next time I want to remember...

Would I make it again?

- ☐ Absolutely!
- ☐ Yes, with a few changes.
- ☐ Probably not.

Recipes i'love to bake next

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that confidence doesn't come from waiting until you feel ready, it comes from trying something new.

Some of these recipes might look a little intimidating at first, but every experienced baker made them for the very first time too. You don't have to master them all at once. Pick one that excites you, enjoy the process, and remember that every attempt teaches you something.

Who knows? One of these might become your new favorite.

Baking Adventures

- ☐ Cinnamon Rolls
- ☐ Croissants
- ☐ Macarons
- ☐ Sourdough Bread
- ☐ Brioche
- ☐ Cheesecake
- ☐ Lemon Meringue Pie
- ☐ Éclairs
- ☐ Cream Puffs
- ☐ Pavlova
- ☐ Tiramisu
- ☐ Homemade Bagels
- ☐ Focaccia
- ☐ Layer Cake
- ☐ Swiss Roll
- ☐ Homemade Donuts
- ☐ Fruit Tart
- ☐ Puff Pastry
- ☐ Soft Pretzels
- ☐ Danish Pastries

Before You Go...

If you've made it this far, thank you for spending a little time with me in the kitchen.

I hope this notebook becomes more than a collection of charts, substitutions, and baking tips. I hope it becomes something you reach for when you're trying a new recipe, celebrating a special occasion, or simply baking because it brings you joy.

If there's one thing I want you to remember, it's this:

You don't have to be an expert to bake something wonderful.

Every confident baker started by measuring ingredients for the first time, wondering if the dough looked right, checking the oven a little too often, and learning through both successes and mistakes.

So don't be afraid to try the recipe that feels just a little out of reach.

Bake the cinnamon rolls.

Try the cheesecake.

Make the croissants someday.

Even if they aren't perfect the first time, they'll teach you something, and that's how confidence is built.

Thank you for letting me be a small part of your baking journey. I can't wait to see what comes out of your oven next.

Happy baking,

ellie guerrero

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