

Tips & Tricks – Odds & Ends – Bits & Basics

Saving time and trouble in the kitchen conserves a cook's energy. Seasoned cooks know many of these tips and basics, but if you're new to the culinary world, you'll appreciate learning these.

Tips & Tricks (totally random)

- Add ½ cup of water or beef broth to 1 lb ground beef (or chicken broth to ground turkey or chicken) for the juiciest burgers ever.
- Cookie and ice cream scoops make life easy. How have I lived without them all these years! Use them to make uniform size cookies and meatballs, dip batter into muffin cups, the list is endless.
- For sky-high muffins, let batter sit in tins for about a half-hour before baking.
- If using coarse or kosher salt, double the amount called for in recipes calling for regular table salt. The opposite also applies.
- Freeze ground meat packed in 1-qt zipper freezer bags, and flatten to about ½ to ¾ thick, distributing evenly. Freeze flat. This takes only a half-hour or so to defrost.
- Wrap chicken or pork chops separately (I use cheap sandwich bags), freeze 2 hours; place in a larger freezer bag. Pull out only pieces you need. No defrosting huge blocks of meat for hours!
- Never buy scallions for \$1 a bunch again! Cut off the white root ends. Put them in a glass jar with an inch of water, place on a sunny windowsill, and they will re-grow! Keep trimming off when you need green tops, and they'll shoot up again! Trimming encourages growth. Mine shot up 8 inches in a week. You can also plant them in a pot after a while.

Freezing veggies

- Most vegetables like peas and green beans should be blanched before freezing. Blanching means boiling for three minutes or so (varies by vegetable), plunging into icewater to “shock,” draining very well, and wrapping securely before freezing. Blanching ensures your veggies will maintain their color and won't get freezer burn if used within a reasonable period.
- I always blanch my bell pepper halves before making stuffed peppers because they bake up so much more colorfully. Fresh sliced, halved, or whole bell peppers, however, can be placed in plastic bags and frozen dry without any need for blanching. So can sliced apples and berries.

Basic recipes I can't live without

Homemade Ranch Dressing is so good, and it is SO much healthier than the bottled kind, which is loaded with sugar (Really! Have you read the ingredients?) This mixes up quick and easy.

- ¾ cup buttermilk (Shake well!)
- ¾ cup real mayonnaise (Do not substitute with Miracle Whip!)
- 2 tsp white vinegar
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp each dried tarragon and basil (Essential!)

- Fresh cracked pepper to taste

Whisk together and refrigerate for a couple of hours if you have time. Make it on the fly, and it still tastes better than that stuff hiding in the valley advertised on TV. Add some fresh chopped chives just before serving. (Mine are coming up! So stoked!)

Crumb Topping can always be found in my 'fridge. I make it in triple batches and never have an excuse not to whip up an awesome pie. This topping bakes up golden-buttery and sweet and makes that second crust unnecessary. I've used it on apple, berry, peach, and rhubarb pies with great success.

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup flour
- ½ stick soft butter
- ½ tsp cinnamon

Mix with your fingers till crumbly. Pile an inch or more deep on top of your pie and bake as usual. Double or triple so you always have it on hand. Store in the refrigerator in a tightly closed container. Makes a great topping for coffee cake, too!

Basic Quiche is a springboard for endless variations you can whip up in record time, amazing your friends and family! Well, maybe not quite that fab, but it's a handy, delicious, and filling meal and makes great leftovers. I love my homemade crust, but I use the prepared rolled crust for my quiche. Add grated cheese (any kind), ham, cooked mushrooms, or whatever.

- 2 cups shredded cheese (Swiss is traditional but not required)
- 2 cups whole milk
- 4 eggs
- ¼ tsp salt
- Dash of nutmeg

Preheat oven to 375°. Beat eggs. Add milk and salt. Pour into unbaked pie shell. Spread cheese (or any other stuff) evenly over top. Sprinkle with nutmeg. Bake 30-40 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Let sit 15 minutes before cutting. Great cold the next day!



Basic Crepes (pronounced krepes) are a meal or a starting point for fancier dishes. Whether served with fruit and eaten like pancakes or stuffed with savory crabmeat filling and smothered in Swiss cheese sauce, crepes are not only versatile—they are also convenient since you can make up a bunch of them and freeze for a quick meal on busy nights.

- 3 cups milk
- 3 eggs
- 2 Tbs melted butter
- 2 ¼ cups flour
- Dash of salt

Beat well. Batter should be thin so add more milk if needed. Prepare a 10-inch nonstick frying pan by heating to medium and spraying lightly with cooking oil. When pan is hot enough (a drop of water dances around and disappears), pour in one third cup of batter and immediately swirl pan around to distribute so batter covers entire pan surface. When top is set and edges brown and begin to curl, flip crepe carefully. Cook till second side is lightly brown. Slide on to a large plate and cover with a damp tea towel till all batter is cooked. These can be rewarmed in the

microwave and served right away or stored in the refrigerator or freezer separated by sheets of wax paper or parchment and well-wrapped in plastic or foil.

Basic Brown Butter Sauce is a delicious way to transform a plain pasta or rice meal into something special, and the ingredients are usually on hand or easily obtainable. This is a basic recipe, but there are endless variations with the addition of mushrooms, Parmesan or Romano cheese, fresh sage leaves (yummy), lemons, hazelnuts, or pine nuts, vegetables like parsley, chives, blanched green beans, asparagus, artichokes or cauliflower, and proteins like lobster, mussels, crab, scallops, or chicken. I've been making this on the fly, so thanks for the great directions from [CD Kitchen!](#)

- Cut 1 cup (2 sticks) of salted butter into tablespoon-sized pieces and place in a 2-quart sauce pan. Place the pan of butter on a burner over medium heat. Bring butter to a slow boil (about 5 minutes).
- Once the butter begins to boil, stir constantly to prevent residue from sticking to the bottom of the pan. As the butter cooks, it will start to foam and rise. Continue stirring, otherwise the butter foam could overflow (about 5 minutes) and catch fire.
- When the butter stops foaming and rising, cook until amber in color (about 1 to 2 minutes). It will have a pleasant caramel aroma.
- Turn off the heat and remove pan from burner. Let the sediment settle to the bottom of the pan for a few minutes.
- Pour the brown butter through a strainer into a small bowl. Do not disturb the residue at the bottom of the pan.
- You can keep it hot over a double boiler. Brown butter can be stored in the refrigerator and reheated in a microwave as needed, but be careful!
- Boil your pasta of choice until *al dente*. Drain pasta and divide into four servings. Spread with 1/4 cup of hot brown butter.

Next time we'll post additional basic recipes you can tuck away in your recipe notebook (you do have one, right?) and pull out when you're in a bind or on a tight schedule. Add your own personal touch, and you'll impress even your toughest critic.