

## A Baker's Dozen: Tips Just in Time for the Holidays

1. **MASTER YOUR FLOUR TECHNIQUE.** For the most accurate flour measurement, spoon it lightly into a dry measuring cup, then level it off with a spatula or straight-edged knife. Loosely adding the flour will prevent packing too much into the measuring cup so you don't end up with dry crumbly cookie dough.
2. **KEEP YOUR BROWN SUGAR SOFT.** To keep brown sugar soft after your first use, store it with a slice of bread, a few marshmallows, a slice of an apple or a damp paper towel to keep the sugar soft.
3. **EGGS AT ROOM TEMPERATURE.** Be sure to let the eggs for your recipe sit at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes before starting so they are ready for mixing. Cold eggs added to some recipes can harden the fat and cause the batter to curdle.
4. **ADD EGGS ONE AT A TIME.** After creaming butter and sugar, eggs should be added one at a time. Thoroughly beating before the next egg is added, this helps the mixture retain more trapped air bubbles that contribute to leavening.
5. **SEPARATE COLD EGGS, WHIP ROOM TEMPERATURE EGGS.** Eggs are easiest to separate when cold, but whites reach their fullest volume when whipped at room temperature. Room temperature egg whites absorb more air than cold ones.
6. **MIX YOUR MERINGUE.** Sugar serves to increase the stability of the foam. It must be added slowly so it doesn't decrease the volume. When beating your meringue, it is important to check to make sure your sugar has dissolved into the egg whites. To test, rub a bit of meringue between thumb and forefinger. If sugar is dissolved, it will feel completely smooth and if it feels grainy or sandy, continue beating.
7. **MAINTAIN THE FLUFF.** Did your perfect meringue lose its fluff? The air beaten into egg whites can be lost quite easily. A small amount of an acidic ingredient, such as cream of tartar, lemon juice or vinegar, acts as a stabilizer and will help keep your fluff intact. Remember to spread the meringue over the filling when it is hot – this prevents weeping and keeps the two layers from sliding apart. Be sure to anchor the meringue to the crust all around the edge of the pie to prevent the meringue from pulling away from the edge during baking.
8. **DIVIDE THE COOKIE DOUGH.** When rolling and cutting cookies, work with half of the cookie dough at a time. Keep the other half refrigerated. It is easier to roll out and too much handling can make the cookie dough warm. Chill cookie cut outs before baking to keep their shape.
9. **WASH & SHINE.** Lightly beaten eggs, whether whole, separated, plain or combined with water or milk, can be used as an "egg wash." Brush the egg mixture on the surface of breads, pastries, cookies, pretzels or biscuits to help them attain a beautiful shine when baked.
10. **ORGANIZE YOUR OVEN.** When baking, position your pans as close to the center of the oven as possible. Placing two baking pans side-by-side is okay as long as there is 2 inches around them to allow good air circulation in the oven.
11. **THE KNIFE TEST.** Unsure if your custard pies, bread puddings or flans/baked custards are done? Try the knife test. Insert a knife about one inch from the center of the dessert and if knife is clean when pulled out, it is done. If part of the dessert clings, bake a few minutes longer and test again.
12. **STORE COOKIES FOR OPTIMAL FRESHNESS.** Don't combine different kinds of cookies in one container because the chewier cookies make the crispier ones soggy. Baked cookies and bars can be frozen up to 3 months. Most cookies and bars freeze well and can be made ahead, delicate cookies or cookies that are

dipped in chocolate are better made last. Cookie dough can be stored in the refrigerator up to 4 days or frozen up to 2 months.

13. **AVOID THE BURN.** If your pastry/crust is browning too quickly, cover with strips of aluminum foil or a pie shield.

For holiday recipes, baking hacks and more, visit [IncredibleEgg.org](https://IncredibleEgg.org) and Incredible Eggs on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#).

## **BONUS TIPS FOR POTENTIAL MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA USE:**

**FLAT COOKIE FIX.** Cool cookie sheets between batches. Hot cookie sheets can melt the butter before the dough can set. Don't grease the cookie sheet unless the recipe calls for it. Bake a test cookie - if it spreads too much, the dough may be too soft. Try refrigerating dough until well chilled (1 to 2 hours). If the dough is still too soft, stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons of flour.

**PLAN AHEAD.** Plan out what you will bake this holiday, make your shopping list, stock your pantry weeks ahead of time.

**SPICE SNIFF TEST.** Ground spices lose their volatile oils and should be used within a year. A simple spice check is to smell them, if you don't get a scent – add it to your shopping list.

**MISE EN PLACE** – (pronounced meez en plas) is French and means, “putting in place”, as in set up. It is used by professional chefs and refers to having all the ingredients measured out and organized before starting to bake. Baking is an exact science. Read the recipe all the way through and do your mise en place before you start to bake.

**JUMPSTART YOUR HOLIDAY BAKING!** Make cookie dough ahead and refrigerate up to 3 days or freeze up to 8 weeks. When freezing cookie doughs, make sure to label and date resealable plastic freezer bags. Thaw cookie dough in the refrigerator and proceed as recipe directs.

Or freeze ready-to-bake...

- Freeze slice-and-bake cookie dough in rolls.
- Roll and cutout cookies – freeze flat with waxed paper between layers.
- Scoop cookie dough onto a baking pan lined with waxed paper. Freeze until solid (about 1 hour), and then place dough balls into labeled resealable plastic freezer bags.

For fresh baked cookies, place frozen cookies on cookie sheets and leave at room temperature while oven preheats. Bake as indicated in the recipe, adding a few minutes to the baking time.

**SELECT SHINY.** Use shiny baking pans and cookies sheets. Dark bakeware absorbs heat faster and cookies may burn.

**QUICK CLEANUP.** Line cookie sheets with parchment paper for easy cleanup. Line pans used for baking brownies and bars with aluminum foil. Lift out when completely cool, peel off foil and cut.

**TEMPERATURE IS IMPORTANT.** COLD – starting with cold ingredients or chilling are key to flaky piecrust and sugar cookies that hold their shapes. HOT - Preheating the oven to the correct temperature is crucial for successful baking results.

**OVEN OVERLOAD.** For best results, bake one cookie sheet at a time in the middle of the center rack of the oven. Be sure there is about 2 inches around the pan to allow for good air circulation. Cookies baked on the bottom rack may burn or not bake evenly.

**DONENESS DILEMMA.** Unsure if your cake is done? Cakes are done when they begin to shrink away from the sides of the pan, when you touch the top lightly and it springs back or when a cake tester or wooden pick inserted in the center comes out clean.