

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR BAKING

using mise en place

When it comes to your time spent baking in the kitchen, would you say that you are organized, content, and mostly successful or overwhelmed, messy, and constantly feeling dissatisfied with the results?

There is a simple solution to help everyone move into the mindset of the pleased and patient baker. **It is a French philosophy called mise en place and it will help you bake with organization, precision, and confidence.** Whether you are an amateur baker or one who has been mixing up cookies, pies, and cakes for years, anyone who aspires to be a better baker should adopt this worthwhile first step.

If you've spent any time at all watching Martha Stewart or any television chefs, you've likely seen their recipe's ingredients measured out and arranged in small individual bowls before they start mixing. That is mise en place, but the practice isn't just for the TV industry. It is actually one of the first things taught in culinary school. The simple concept is often overlooked, but can make a huge difference in the outcome of your baked goods and your stress level while preparing them.

Baking is a science and all about precision. Depending on the type of recipe you are preparing, there are a series of different chemical reactions happening between ingredients that contribute to the color, texture, and rise of the cookies or pie. Any one misstep or incorrect proportion can result in a less than satisfying result. For that reason, thoroughly preparing your ingredients and staying organized is of the utmost importance when baking.

WHAT IS MISE EN PLACE?

The French term *Mise en place* (pronounced *meez ahn plahs*) translates to mean "**everything in its place.**" It means that you have all of your ingredients prepped, portioned, and laid out in a logical order before anything goes into your mixing bowl. Your butter has been softened, eggs brought to room temperature, and nuts have been chopped. The utensils and tools that you'll need are out and ready. Whatever needs measured or laid out for a particular recipe has been.

BENEFITS OF MISE EN PLACE

IT'S FASTER OVERALL - It seems counterintuitive since you spend extra time getting your ingredients measures and tools gathered, but having everything ready in advance is a more organized and efficient way to bake saving you time in the end. It is easier to measure everything all at once than to repeatedly stop what you are doing while preparing the recipe to measure another ingredient.

YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED - Have you ever started preparing a recipe only to realize you were out of something after ingredients have gone into the bowl? Or have you been ready to use a particular cookie scoop or spatula and then not been able to find it? If you lay everything out in the beginning you know what you have (or don't have) and can make substitutions and adjustments if need be.

THERE'S TIME FOR RESEARCH - You have a chance to research baking methods involved that you may not understand. This is especially important for beginner bakers. Given that one of the steps of mise en place involves reading through the instructions beforehand, you have the benefit of being sure that you understand the order and process of the recipe. If there is a technique you are unsure of, there is time to do a quick search online to make sure you know what you're doing.

INGREDIENTS ARE AT OPTIMAL TEMPERATURES - Many recipes call for room temperature ingredients. This is especially important when doing something like creaming butter and sugar or using cream cheese. If you decide at the spur of the moment to bake cookies, you'll have to wait for the butter to soften or risk the two not creaming properly. But, by the time you are done measuring your ingredients and preparing your work area for mise en place, the butter will have softened and will cream perfectly.

COMPLICATED RECIPES ARE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND AND EXECUTE - Have you ever looked at a recipe and found it a bit overwhelming? By breaking it down step by step and getting ingredients measured beforehand, the recipe becomes more manageable. You can focus on the actions of putting the recipe together if you have your tools and ingredients ready and have one less step on your mind.

HELPFUL IN TIME SENSITIVE SITUATIONS - When there is an ingredient that needs to be added quickly, it is helpful to have it premeasured to ensure that you add it at the exact right moment. Interruptions and delay can cause custards to curdle, butter to burn, and batters to deflate.

YOU'LL MAKE FEWER MISTAKES - You become a more patient and precise baker who gets better and more consistent results. You won't make the mistake of adding an ingredient twice or not at all. You have the time to make sure your measurements are accurate. You'll see if something needs prep work ahead of time, like letting a dough chill, that you may miss if you hadn't been so prepared.

WHEN MISE EN PLACE IS THE MOST USEFUL

While you can benefit anytime from this French technique (even when cooking dinner) there are a few instances when it is most useful:

- Does the recipe say that certain steps must be done quickly or immediately?
- Are you told to combine ingredients while continuing to stir or whisk?
- Is there an extensive list of ingredients?
- Is there something about the recipe that has you overwhelmed or intimidated?

SUPPLIES YOU NEED

It isn't necessary to go out and buy a bunch of new tools and equipment in order to get your baking ingredients together ahead of time. (Although you can if you want to!) Use whatever you have around the house to hold your ingredients.

- **Proper measuring tools** like measuring cups and measuring spoons or a digital scale
- **Small bowls or ramekins:** Use glass pyrex bowls, cups, cereal bowls, plastic kid's bowls, or even storage containers in various sizes to hold whatever individual ingredients you're measuring.
- **A few trays:** While not necessary, it can be helpful to gather ingredients that go in at one time together on a small tray, sheet pan or even a dinner plate. That way, as you finish with that step and the ingredients have been added you can slide the next group of ingredients.

SIX STEP PROCESS OF MISE EN PLACE

STEP 1: CLEAR YOUR WORKSPACE: Take a moment and clean the area where you'll be preparing your recipe. Move the clutter off the countertop. Empty the sink and dishwasher. Make sure you have the space you need for the prepping and execution of your pie, bread, or whatever you are making.

STEP 2: READ THE RECIPE COMPLETELY AND THOROUGHLY FROM START TO

FINISH : Reading through the recipe is a crucial first step. Doing so allows you to get a clear picture of the steps you will take to prepare your desired baked good. You can see if there are preparatory tasks you need to take before mixing anything together like softening the butter or bringing eggs to room temperature. You can take note of prep work that you can do ahead of time like chopping chocolate or nuts.

STEP 3: RESEARCH TECHNIQUES YOU MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH: As you read through the instructions, pay close attentions to any methods used to prepare the recipe that you may not understand, like folding an ingredient into your batter. Now is your chance to do a quick search online for a video or written tutorial about techniques and definitions for terminology you don't understand.

STEP 4: GET OUT YOUR TOOLS: Scan the recipe to see what utensils and appliances you'll need. Measuring cups and spoons. Wooden spoons. A hand mixer or stand mixer. Your baking pans. And if something needs done to the equipment, like buttering the pan or chilling a mixing bowl, do that now.

STEP 5: PREPARE YOUR INGREDIENTS: Measure out all of the ingredients you'll need for the entire recipe into small prep bowls. If anything needs done, like chopping walnuts or melting butter, do that now. Line everything up in the order that they will be used and place them in groups by when you'll use them. If the recipe says to mix certain dry ingredients together in a separate bowl, group them together.

STEP 6: BEGIN YOUR BAKING: Your actual baking process will be one continuous flow from step to step without the need to stop to grab your measuring spoons or grate the ginger. Focus just on combining what you've portioned out. As you use the ingredients, set the empty bowls aside and move the remaining ingredients closer to you.