

What You Need To Know About Baking Perfect Cookies, Cakes, And Pies

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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.)** — It's the season for prolific baking. And, what can be more frustrating than spending hours baking cookies that burn on the bottoms or bake unevenly?

Maybe you don't understand why one batch can turn out perfectly and the next batch is burned on the bottom and underbaked on the top. According to Alletta Schadler, Lebanon extension director, there are scientific reasons for baking problems.

"If you want top quality cookies, cakes, and pies, there are tricks to the trade," Schadler said at a recent workshop held at Prescott Firehouse. "You can use the same cookie batter and have the cookies turn out entirely different depending on the cookie sheet used."

The texture, dryness, appearance, flavor, doneness, and volume of cookies are affected by the type of baking sheet used.

Here are some tips from Schadler:

- The best conductor of heat is aluminum. A medium weight moderately shiny aluminum pan or cookie sheet will produce the same degree of browning on the bottom of the product as will occur on the top. Keep your pans clean and shiny by washing thoroughly and cleaning with a steel wool pan. The aluminum pan that has been painted on the outside will absorb heat at a different rate than an unpainted pan. Food will be browner.

- Air cushion aluminum cookie sheets and baking pans bake slower than single thickness pans. Additional baking time will almost always be needed. Cookies may flatten more because they bake and set slower. Be sure to cool sheets completely between uses. The center of thick cookies may tend to be underdone.

- Dark pans such as non-stick coated or black aluminum will absorb heat and will cause the bottoms and edges to brown faster than the tops of food. You may need to reduce heat or shorten baking time. It may be hard to get evenly baked cookies.

- Glass baking dishes will absorb and hold heat, resulting in greater browning and some drying out of the product unless the oven temperature is reduced by 25 degrees. Shorter baking time may be needed. This characteristic of holding heat is desirable when baking pies. Do not reduce the temperature for pies. Ceramic baking pans may take longer depending on how thick they are.

- Shiny aluminum foil pans reflect heat and may need extra baking time to achieve proper browning. Foil pie pans almost always produce underbaked bottom crusts and maybe underdone fillings. Placing the foil pan on a baking sheet may help remedy this problem.

- Non-stick coated tin pans will resist rust and be easier to clean. Depending on how dark the coating is on the outside or bottom of the pan, the browning rate may be increased.

- Stainless steel baking pans are not good conductors of heat. They are slow to respond and uneven in effect.

FAT SUBSTITUTING INGREDIENTS

Many people are trying to watch calories by reducing their fat intake. For this reason, cooks are experimenting and trying low-fat dessert recipes — often with disappointing results.

Schadler said, "Changing the form or type of fat in the recipe can have significant effects on the texture. Other alterations must be made to compensate. Fats tenderize baked products and improve keeping qualities. Reducing fat will usually affect the finished product's texture and shelf life."

She suggests reducing the total amount of fat in a recipe by one fourth. This works best in fruit and nut breads, cake recipes and sauces. Do not do this in rolled cookies or pie crust recipes where fat is critical. Drop cookies might



All you even need to know about baking perfect cookies by using the right cookie sheet is explained by Alletta Schadler, Lebanon County extension director, while Fran Deltz, right, listens.

lend themselves to fat reduction. Be prepared for some change in texture. The best way to modify a recipe is to try to find a lowered fat recipe of a similar type and compare to the recipe you are thinking of modifying.

TYPE OF FAT IN A RECIPE

• If the recipe calls for oil, use an oil that is lower in saturated fat. The lowest is canola, then sunflower or corn or olive. It will not

(Turn to Page B19)

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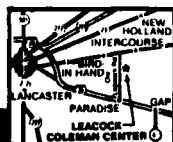


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