

A top-down view of various fresh ingredients including uncooked spaghetti, a bowl of olive oil, tomatoes, basil, garlic, and spices on a dark surface. The ingredients are arranged on a dark, textured background, with some items like the spaghetti and tomatoes resting on a piece of burlap fabric. The text "50 Handy Kitchen Tips" is written in a white, cursive font on the right side of the image.

50 Handy Kitchen Tips

Heavenlyhomecooking.com

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General Kitchen Tips

1. If you have a jar that is difficult to open, put on a pair of dishwashing gloves to get a better grip and make the opening easier. You can also use the rug pad or shelf liner from tip #16 below.
2. After boiling pasta, save the water for your houseplants or garden herbs. The starchy water provides extra nutrients for the plants.
3. Store your spices in a cool, dry place, not above your stove. Humidity, light and heat will cause herbs to lose their flavor.
4. **Make Your Own Celery Flakes:** Instead of cutting off the leafy tops of celery and tossing away, try making your own celery flakes. Simply wash and dry the leaves well, place in oven at 180° F. until crispy dried (a few hours), crumble and store in an air tight container. Use the celery flakes in cooking dishes such as soups, stews, stuffing and anything else you'd like to add a little flavor.



Instead of cutting off the leafy tops of celery and tossing away, try making your own celery flakes

5. If you like to do a lot of baking, save the paper or foil wrap from blocks or squares of butter and use them to grease baking pans. Keep the paper refrigerated in a separate baggy. Not only do they do an effective job buttering the pans, it also puts to good use something we often toss freely.
6. Do you have an old box of baking soda in the pantry and you're not sure whether or not it's still good? Fill a small cup half full with vinegar and drop a teaspoon of baking soda in it. If things start fizzing, the baking soda is active.
7. Don't have a scrub pad? Crumple up a handful of aluminum foil and use it to scrub your pots.
8. To clean your glass cookware, just fill the container with water, add up to six Alka-Seltzer tablets, and let it soak for an hour. The stains should easily scrub away.
9. Cast iron skillet care:

To season: You need to season your cast iron skillet before you use it for the first time. To do so, rub the interior surface with a layer of coconut oil (healthier than vegetable oil or shortening). Place a large cookie sheet in the bottom of your oven. Place the cast iron skillet upside down on the center rack of your oven and bake at 450 degrees for 30 minutes. The cookie sheet will catch the oil that flows off the skillet. Turn off the oven and allow to cool to room temperature.

To clean: After use, pour a bit of salt and oil into your skillet. Use a paper towel and rub the mixture around the skillet. Stubborn debris can be removed with a spatula. Then take a clean paper towel, and wipe out the inside of your cast iron skillet. Never wash in the dishwasher or use liquid dish soap.

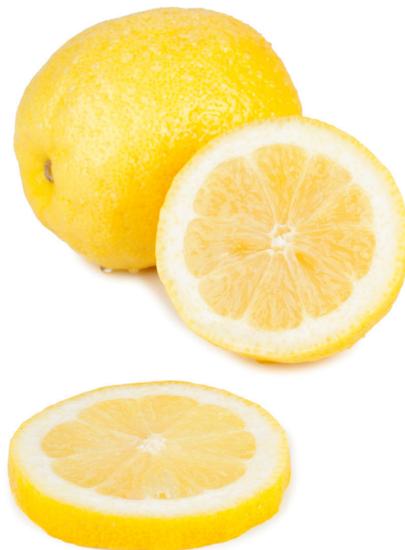
Preparation Tips

10. Peel ginger with a spoon. Rather than using a paring knife or vegetable peeler, reach for the spoon. Scrape it against the skin and it'll come right off, following every contour and minimizing waste.
11. Slice avocados in their skins. Cut them in half. Use a folded towel to grab the avocado half that contains the pit. Remove the pit by whacking it with the heel of a chef's knife and twisting it out. Dislodge the pit from your knife by giving the knife a sharp whack on your sink. The pit should fall off. Then slice the avocado directly in the skin using the tip of a paring knife or chef's knife. When you then scoop it out with a spoon, you'll have slices ready to go, with less mess than trying to fiddle with slippery peeled avocado on a cutting board.
12. Buy minced garlic and keep it on hand in the refrigerator. You can usually find minced garlic in the produce section of your grocery store. I use prepared minced garlic all the time and haven't noticed a difference in flavor between prepared garlic and fresh garlic.
13. To safely cut wobbly fruits and vegetables (like potatoes), cut a thin slice along the length of the fruit or vegetable with a sharp knife. Turn the fruit or vegetable cut side down. This creates a "foot" for it to stand on and makes it more stable. Slice your fruit or vegetable as required. As you get to the end you may find that your fruit or vegetable becomes unstable and difficult to grip. If so, turn it so that the side you just cut is face down on the board. Continue to slice.
14. Leftover onion will keep much longer when the root is left intact - use top part first.
15. Here's an easy way to slice brownies and bars. Before baking coat the bottom and sides of your baking pan with softened butter, line your baking pan with a strip of parchment paper leaving an overhang on each side. Brush with butter and lay down another strip of parchment paper perpendicular to the first again leaving an overhang on both sides. You will have a cross pattern. Pour in your batter and bake according to your recipe instructions. Once cooled, lift your brownies or bars from the baking pan with the parchment paper. Lay on a flat surface and slice. Peel off the parchment paper.
16. To keep your cutting board in place, cut a piece of rug pad or shelf liner to fit the bottom of your cutting board. Lay the rug pad or shelf liner down and then place your cutting board on top of it. Cut away.
17. If you can't stand mixing raw hamburger by hand and the wooden spoon just won't do, try covering each of your hands in a clean plastic bag (or baggy) and dig in. The plastic bags will still give your hands and fingers free movement, yet keep them free from raw meat contamination.



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18. Wear gloves when chopping hot peppers, like jalapeño, to protect your hands from being burned by the capsaicin in peppers. If you forget to do this and your hands feel like they're on fire, you can get relief by soaking your hands in vegetable oil or rubbing petroleum jelly on them. Since oil and capsaicin are both hydrophobic hydrocarbons the capsaicin that has not already been absorbed into tissues will be picked up into solution and easily removed.
19. To slice meat thinly, partially freeze it and it will slice easily.
20. When making French fries, let raw potatoes stand in cold water for at least half an hour before frying to improve their crispness.
21. Microwave a lemon for 15 seconds to increase the juice you get from squeezing.
22. To hull strawberries, after washing insert a plastic straw in the stem of the strawberry and push the stem out.
23. When using fresh herbs such as dill, chives, parsley, etc., hold them together in small bunches and snip with kitchen scissors. It is a lot faster this way, and you'll find the herbs will be light and fluffy, not bruised and wet as they often get when chopped.
24. Microwave garlic cloves for 15 seconds and the skins slip right off.
25. Egg whites should always be at room temperature before whipping. Be certain there is no yolk in the whites and that the bowl and beaters are perfectly clean. Cream, on the other hand, should be well-chilled. For the largest volume, chill the bowl and beaters before whipping.



Cooking & Baking Tips

26. To get a good sear on your meat, take the meat out of the refrigerator 30 minutes before you're going to cook it. Pat it dry with a paper towel. Too much moisture makes the meat steam instead of sear, and you will lose that rich brown crust. Preheat your skillet - let it get very hot. (Don't use a nonstick skillet because nonstick skillets are not intended for very high heat.) You can test the heat by throwing a few drops of water on the skillet. If the water drops sizzle then it's ready. Add a bit of oil. If you are going to season your meat, do it just before adding to the skillet. (If you've marinated your meat in a briny marinade, then there is no need to season again. If you've marinated your meat in a sugary marinade, keep an eye on it to prevent burning.) You want to wait until the last minute to season it because salt will pull moisture from the meat if sprinkled on too early. Cook the meat and wait until it releases from the skillet before turning it. (It will release once a nice crust has formed.) If there's any resistance, let it cook for another minute.)



To keep cauliflower white while cooking - add a little milk to the water

27. Try steam cooking your hard or soft-cooked eggs. Bring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch water to boil in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Using tongs, gently place eggs in boiling water (eggs will not be submerged). You can use a steamer basket too. Cover saucepan and cook eggs 15 minutes for hard cooked eggs, 5 minutes for soft-cooked eggs.
28. To prevent bacon spatters, try lightly dusting the bacon with flour before frying. This helps prevent the spatters and meat shrinkage.
29. When frying with butter, don't cook with high heat since butter has a low smoking/burning point.
30. To prevent the juices from your fruit pie from running over while baking, cut four small slits in the top of your pie crust and stand one piece of uncooked tubed pasta (at least 2-3 inches long) into each slit. This will allow steam to escape and juices will run up the pasta and back into the pie. Once baked, simply remove the pasta.
31. To keep cauliflower white while cooking - add a little milk to the water.
32. Cabbage odor can be avoided by dropping two English walnuts (uncracked) into the kettle while cooking.
33. If your cake recipe calls for nuts, heat them first in the oven, then dust with flour before adding to the batter to keep them from settling to the bottom of the pan.
34. Cookies will spread if your dough is too pliable by allowing butter to get too soft. If your cookies are spreading too much, try refrigerating the dough for a couple of hours before baking.

35. Sautéing in four steps: (1) heat the pan over medium high heat for a few minutes; (2) add the oil; (3) add the food, but don't overcrowd; (4) stir frequently but not constantly.
36. The difference between boiling and simmering: boiling is a constant churning with bubbles rising rapidly to the top; simmering is more gentle with bubbles rising to the top every several seconds.
37. To add flavor to grilled foods without a smoker: Tear off a sheet of aluminum foil to make a pouch (by folding sheet in half and sealing sides), fill with wood chips and seal open end closed. Poke holes around the top of the pouch (when laid flat) and place directly on burner or coals. Heat on high until chips begin to smoke.
38. If you like tender, juicy ribs where the meat just falls off the bone, marinate for several hours in citrus juice. When ready to cook, liberally cover the ribs with your favorite spice rub, wrap in aluminum foil and bake in a 375 degree oven for two hours. When done, brush on your favorite barbecue sauce and grill for 10-15 minutes.
39. Allow the cooked meat to rest for about 5 minutes before cutting or serving, this helps the juices get reabsorbed back into the meat.



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Freezer Tips

40. To keep leftover fresh herbs from going to waste, add chopped herbs to each well in an ice cube tray and cover with water. Freeze. Once frozen, remove cubes to a freezer bag (don't forget to label) and store. Add cubes directly to sauces, soups or stews.
41. Another way to preserve the flavor of fresh herbs is to make herb butter. Let the butter soften, then add finely chopped herbs in any combination, about 2 to 4 tablespoons per stick of butter. The butter freezes well, and you can serve it spread on French bread or with seafood or chicken.
42. To save money, buy chicken parts (breasts and thighs) in bulk. Remove each piece of chicken and place in sandwich bags, one piece of chicken per bag. Label a freezer bag with the date and place the individual sandwich bags in the freezer bag. Store in freezer. When you're ready to use, thaw in the refrigerator only what you need.
43. When you buy a bottle of wine for cooking, pour it into the wells of ice cube containers and freeze. Once frozen, remove to the cubes to a labeled freezer bag. Add cubes directly to recipes that call for wine. One cube = approximately 1 ounce. 8 cubes = 1 cup. Bonus tip: You can do the same with stock.
44. Store your marshmallows in the freezer. They won't dry out that way.
45. Freeze cookie dough ahead. Try preparing a few batches of cookie dough at once and freezing the extra that you won't be baking that day. You can roll the dough in logs first before freezing (wrap the dough really well in wax paper and place in a freezer bag) and then just slice off and bake what you need whenever you crave freshly baked cookies, have last minute guests or need dessert for an impromptu get-together.
46. Because butter can pick up flavors from other foods in your refrigerator, store your butter in the freezer for better flavor. Thaw out sticks in the refrigerator as you need them.
47. Store hard and semi-firm cheeses in the freezer. Wrap hard and semi-firm cheeses like Parmesan, cheddar, and Brie tightly in plastic wrap, seal in zipper-lock bag, and freeze. Store in freezer for up to 2 months. Defrost in refrigerator before using.
48. Freeze citrus zest ahead. Remove zest from entire fruit. Deposit grated zest in 1/2-teaspoon piles on plate and freeze. Once piles are frozen, place them in zipper-lock freezer bag and return them to freezer.
49. Store nuts in your freezer. Due to their high fat content, nuts go rancid quickly unless frozen. Freeze nuts in zipper-lock freezer bag. Frozen nuts stay fresh for months. No need to defrost before using; frozen nuts can be chopped just as easily as fresh.



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They won't dry out that way.

Kitchen Essentials

50. If you're just starting out with cooking, this list of kitchen essentials will get you on your way to a well-stocked kitchen.

Cookware:

- 1 quart saucepan with lid
- 3 quart saucepan with lid
- 4-6 quart Dutch Oven pot (make sure it has a lid)
- 6-8 inch skillet
- 12 inch skillet with cover (lid)
- baking sheet (at least one)
- muffin pan
- 9x5x3 loaf pan
- 13x9 baking dish
- 8x8 baking dish
- 2 8-inch or 9-inch round baking pans
- roasting pan or roaster (with lid)
- pizza pan
- a casserole dish or two

Utensils (many of these items can be purchased at your local dollar store):

- a set of mixing bowls (preferably glass)
- set of measuring cups
- one clear glass or plastic measuring cup
- Wooden or plastic spoons
- Rubber spatulas (metal spatulas for BBQ)
- paring knife
- serrated knife
- chef's knife (do invest in a good knife)
- carving knife
- sharpening steel (to keep knives sharp)
- a meat mallet
- long-handled fork
- long-handled spoon
- slotted spoon
- tongs
- kitchen scissors
- corkscrew
- can opener (hand or electric)
- grater/shredder
- bottle opener
- strainer
- cutting boards, one small, one large

- sifter
- rolling pin
- meat thermometer
- oven thermometer
- wire cooling rack
- kitchen timer
- a set of flatware (silverware)

Food Essentials:

- Flour. All-purpose flour is the best choice unless you plan to do much baking. Cake flour is appropriate for lighter cakes and bread flour is suggested for making bread. Self-rising flours include the leavening so if using it, don't add additional baking powder or salt.
- Sweeteners. Granulated or white sugar, brown sugar, honey, artificial sweeteners, and sugar substitutes are all available on the market. Choose what works best for an individual lifestyle and need but remember that real sugar works best in many baking recipes.
- Cooking oils. Canola, vegetable, corn, and flavored oils are all available for frying. Peanut and other nut based oils are often more expensive. Consider taste, fat content, and other factors before choosing one. Shortening-based products are also available but oils are considered much more heart-healthy.
- Leavenings. Baking powder, baking soda, and yeasts are all common leavening ingredients. Keep some on hand.
- Cornstarch. This staple can be used to thicken sauces and gravies, in puddings, and in pie fillings.
- Margarine or butter. These are used both as spreads on baked goods and in cooking. Learn what recipes call for butter and use the type of spread that suits best.
- Milk. Whether or not milk is used as a beverage or over cereal, it is an ingredient in many recipes and has multiple uses. If fresh milk isn't used often enough, consider using powdered milk that can be made up on demand for use in recipes.
- Eggs. Even if they're not the focal point of breakfast, eggs are a common ingredient in many dishes.
- Spices and seasonings. Think beyond the basic salt and pepper. Garlic powder, onion powder, seasoning blends (Cajun, poultry, seafood, Italian, Greek), basil, thyme, sage, and many others can increase flavor of favorite foods. Consult any cookbook for a suggested spice chart or pick up a spice rack that includes some basic starters.

- Condiments. Choose what suits your taste but ketchup, mustard, barbecue sauces, steak sauces, soy or teriyaki sauces, are all standards in most refrigerators. Don't forget things like pickles, relishes, or other snacks. Vinegar is another common recipe ingredient.
- Fruits and vegetables. Keep an assortment of favorites on hand in frozen or canned form. Use the crisper drawer of the refrigerator to store fresh fruits and vegetables. Consider bagged salad pre-mixes and pre-chopped vegetables to save time.
- Meats. Unless cooks want to dash to the market daily, it's wise to keep a few choice cuts in the freezer or to buy ahead. Ground meat, chicken, pork, beef, and other meats all come in handy. Choose favorite cuts. Thaw frozen foods properly and never keep fresh meats for more than a few days in the refrigerator. Do not refreeze meat that has been thawed. Keep a few cold cuts or other lunch meats on hand.
- Dry foods and canned goods. These can include beans and lentils, baking mixes, dinner mixes, and more. Keep a few on hand in the pantry (or a convenient cabinet) for quick meals when needed. Canned or dry soups, canned pastas, and other ready to eat items are also advisable to keep on hand. It's a good idea to keep canned tomato sauce, tomato paste and diced tomatoes on hand as they can be used in many recipes. Canned chicken and beef stock are also good items to keep on hand.

This list of kitchen essentials is adapted from an article written by Lee Ann Sontheimer Murphy at <http://www.googobits.com/articles/p0-2635-kitchen-essentials-what-every-kitchen-should-have.html>