

EXTENSION CONNECTION - Baking Tips

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Q. Why are my cookies spreading more as they bake?

A. When using margarine for the fat in the cookie, a true margarine will contain 80% vegetable fat and have 100 calories per tablespoon. Margarine with less than this amount of fat (and therefore fewer calories) has had some of the fat removed and replaced with water, technically making it a spread. Spreads do not perform well in some products, such as cookies. Cookies made with a spread will tend to spread as they bake and not hold their shape.

Q. Can I substitute applesauce for oil when baking to reduce fat and calories?

A. Yes, applesauce is a good choice since it does not have a pronounced flavor or color that would greatly change the baked product. The greater the proportion of applesauce used for oil, the more difference you will see in your finished product. Try substituting about 1/3 of the oil first, and alter the amount accordingly from there on.

Q. Is there a substitution for “self-rising” flour or do I have to buy a package for a new recipe?

A. You do not need to purchase a whole package of self-rising flour when only a cup or two is needed. Turn all-purpose flour into one cup of self-rising flour by adding 1-1/2 teaspoon baking powder and 1/2 teaspoon salt to one cup all-purpose flour.

Q. What is the difference in the white flours available in the grocery store?

A. Different kinds of flours are made from different kinds of wheat. Bread flour is milled from hard wheat. Bread flour that has more gluten, the elastic substance that develops when flour gets wet and is manipulated by kneading, beating or stirring. Gluten helps to give bread its structure. Cake flour is milled from soft wheat. Its gluten content is less than hard wheat, so it is used for cakes and pastries that need tenderness. All-purpose flour is good general use flour and is made from a blend of hard and soft wheat.

Q. How do I know that a flour is whole grain?

A. Read the ingredient list on the label. The first ingredient needs to say "whole" wheat or

whatever type of grain you are buying. We are encouraged to eat more whole grains to increase our dietary fiber for many health benefits.

Q. What are some basic baking tips?

- A.** Remember don't crowd the oven. Pans should never touch each other or the sides of the oven, or be placed over or under each other on the racks.

Use measuring spoons, not eating utensils, to measure small amounts. Don't guess. Use the exact measurements and level off spoons with a straight edge spatula or knife. For dry ingredients, dip the measuring spoon into the container until overflowing, and then level off. For liquid ingredients, pour liquid until it reaches the top edge of the spoon. Measure over a separate cup or bowl so any extra does not fall into the mix.

Measure liquids such as water, milk, vegetable oil, honey or syrups in a clear glass or plastic liquid measuring cup that is placed on the counter. Bend down to check the amount at eye level. Use a rubber spatula to scrape out all the liquid. For easier removal of honey or molasses, grease or spray the cup or spoon first.

Measure brown sugar by packing it firmly into the dry measuring cup and leveling off. It should hold its shape when turned out of the cup.

To test for doneness in cakes, quick breads and bar cookies, use a toothpick inserted in the center. The toothpick should come out clean and dry, or have only a few crumbs clinging. Yeast breads, roll and loaves should be golden brown on top, sides and bottom.

Call me at the Webster County Extension Office, 515-576-2119, or E-mail pgilbert@iastate.edu, with your nutrition and health questions. You may also call our toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804 or visit the Webster County Extension web site: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/webster>.