

essential recipes for
everyday cooking

KITCHEN SIMPLE



JAMES PETERSON
winner of 6 James Beard awards

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Introduction

Kitchen Simple is a book of simple recipes that can be executed in a half hour or less. It is designed for people who have worked all day and don't want to spend hours in the kitchen. And while some of the recipes may require a bit longer than a half hour to cook, most of the time is when a cake is baking or a pot is simmering away, and you are free to prepare another recipe, perhaps a side dish.

Kitchen Simple does make certain assumptions. It assumes you're smart but that you know little about cooking and just want to put good food on the table. In many of my books, there are pages and pages of context and explanation before the recipe proper begins. In *Kitchen Simple*, I get right to the matter at hand. Many of the recipes will be familiar and seem almost ridiculously easy, but they are included to remind you of the infinite possibilities of simple recipes. These simple recipes lend themselves well to improvisation such that you might find yourself fooling around in the kitchen inventing your own recipes.

While *Kitchen Simple* doesn't call for a lot of exotic ingredients, it does assume that you have access to a good supermarket, and that you're willing to shop. Keep in mind that it is helpful to have a pantry of dry goods and supplies so when you shop you're only looking for meat or fish, and produce. Most of the recipes in *Kitchen Simple* are inexpensive to prepare but it is not a book for cooking on the cheap or for someone on a diet. Many recipes contain small amounts of cream and butter. My attitude has always been that moderation in all things is best, including moderation itself.

A good number of the recipes in *Kitchen Simple* are designed as first courses. While Americans usually don't eat in courses (at least not at home), there are many dishes that work best when served on their own. Salads are a prime example of dishes that don't work as side dishes, yet most aren't substantial enough to be served as main courses. But remember, if you serve a salad as a first course, you can dispense with a vegetable to accompany the main course.

Kitchen Simple includes ideas for a well-stocked pantry so you can be prepared for unexpected guests or for nights when shopping is just not an option. And, while *Kitchen Simple* is not a technique book designed to teach the ins and outs (and the context) of various cooking styles, it does contain a discussion of the (surprisingly small number of) basic cooking techniques needed by any competent cook.

A few of the dishes are more time-intensive than others. These are included as weekend projects, and even though the cooking is long, the prep time is less than 30 minutes.

So how much time is needed to make an entire meal? Most of the dishes included here are designed to take a half hour of active preparation, not total cooking time. If you're making three dishes—a salad, a piece of fish, and a dessert for example—it's not going to take you an hour and a half to make the three dishes. The time will be closer to 45 minutes since the fish can be cooking while you're chopping vegetables for the salad. This is a good thing to keep in mind when constructing a menu—plan so that you can work on more than one dish at a time. Try to organize yourself so you're not making three dishes that require the stove or oven. For example, you might serve a salad as a first course, a piece of sautéed meat or fish as a main

course, and roast potatoes as an accompaniment.

INGREDIENTS

You'll save a lot of time if you have a well-stocked pantry with things like olive oil, anchovies, pasta, dried beans, canned things, spices, dried herbs, and so on. When writing the book I've made several assumptions, including that you'll have a well-equipped pantry and a fairly well-equipped kitchen.

Anchovies

Most anchovies come packed in oil; look for ones packed in olive oil, and that come in bottles, not cans. You can also find anchovies packed in salt, which is preferable. If you find these, soak them in cold water for 30 minutes before you use them. They'll come tight-packed and will cling together; you should separate them as they soak. The best come from Sicily in large blue tins.

Baking Soda and Baking Powder

Don't confuse these two. Baking soda is sodium bicarbonate and releases carbon dioxide in the presence of an acid. Baking powder contains acid that releases carbon dioxide when it becomes moist. Baking soda is called for in baked goods that contain something acidic, such as sour cream. Baking powder is called for in situations where there's no ingredient that provides acid. Be sure to use "double acting" baking powder, which is what most baking powder is anyway.

Bay Leaves

Use imported bay leaves (most come from Turkey) instead of domestic (which come from California). Domestic bay leaves have a strong eucalyptus flavor that can overwhelm the other flavors.

Broth

The best broth is homemade starting with raw meat and bones. You can tell if your broth was successful by seeing if it gels in the refrigerator, which indicates it has the necessary gelatin to give body to soups and sauces. When making broth, it's imperative that it never reaches a hard boil or the churning will emulsify particles and fat into the broth. There are now better brands of low-sodium (low salt) broth, but they still don't gel in the refrigerator and are too salty to be boiled down (reduced) for a sauce.

Butter

These recipes were tested using unsalted butter. If you're using salted butter in a dessert, decrease the amount of salt added in the rest of the recipe. One stick of salted butter contains about $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt. So, if you have a recipe that calls for 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 cup (2 sticks) of butter, you know the butter is adding $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. Therefore, you should c

the salt down to ½ teaspoon.

Cream

All the cream called for is heavy cream or whipping cream which usually comes “ultra-pasteurized.” Ultra-pasteurized cream can be hard to beat, so if you can find just regular pasteurized cream, it is preferable (although not essential). Both of these have a high butterfat content and won’t separate when boiled. Don’t substitute light cream or half-and-half, which don’t thicken as well and may curdle. You can also use crème fraîche, which has a high butterfat content. Don’t substitute sour cream, which has a lower butterfat content and can curdle. You can make your own crème fraîche by inoculating 4 cups of cream with ½ cup buttermilk and leaving the mixture in a warm place for 24 hours.



crème fraîche

Eggs

The recipes in this book were tested with large eggs. White and brown eggs can be used interchangeably.

Flour

Flour varies from brand to brand. Recipes in this book were tested using King Arthur brand all-purpose flour, which is a relatively hard flour with a fair amount of gluten. If you’re using a different brand, you may find that your flour absorbs liquid less readily than King Arthur’s, so, when making tart dough, add less liquid than the recipe calls for, until you are certain it is all needed.

Meat Glaze (demi-glace)

It's handy to have meat glaze for thickening a pan sauce and giving it body. You can make your own meat glaze by cooking chicken broth down to a fraction of its original volume (definitely a weekend project), or you can buy commercial meat glaze. One of the better meat glazes is made by More-than-Gourmet, usually found in the gourmet section of the supermarket. Meat glaze can be stored in the refrigerator for several months and can be frozen indefinitely.

Milk

All milk used, except for buttermilk and coconut milk, is whole. Sometimes used for making custards, milk tends to curdle when simmered with other ingredients, especially vegetables. For this reason, it has to be stabilized with flour. The best known example of this is béchamel sauce.

Nut Oils

Nut oils turn rancid very quickly unless they're made from roasted nuts. Le Blanc brand is consistently the best brand I've found. Keep nut oils, such as walnut or hazelnut oil, in the freezer.

Nuts

Because nuts turn rancid rapidly, even in the refrigerator, a good trick is to toast them as soon as you get them and then store them in the freezer. Toasting brings out their flavor and impedes rancidity. To toast nuts, spread them out on a sheet pan and roast for about 10 minutes at 350°F, or until you can smell them.

Olive Oil

I use both "pure" olive oil, made by stripping the flavor from olive oil that doesn't make the grade to be called extra virgin olive oil. Pure olive oil is inexpensive (especially if you buy in large quantities) and doesn't have the sometimes fishy flavor that many vegetable oils have. When extra virgin olive oil is needed—in dishes where its aroma is not being cooked off—it's stated in the recipe; otherwise use pure olive oil.

Parsley

In general, I find fresh flat-leaf parsley to have more aroma than the curly variety, but feel free to substitute one for the other.

Pepper

Almost indispensable for savory foods, pepper comes in black, white, or green. Black pepper is the most commonly used because of its bold, round flavor. White pepper tends to be used for stuffings or in conjunction with other spices. It is also used when specks of black pepper would upset the appearance of, say, a cream soup. Green pepper is the underripe peppercorn and is often crushed or chopped and worked into sauces.

Salt

The recipes in this book have been tested using regular fine salt, except in some specialized recipes such as the [radish toasts](#).

Sugar

All sugar is granulated unless otherwise stated.

Vanilla

Use authentic vanilla extract, not artificial. Artificial vanilla will give your baked foods a cloying mass-produced quality. If you're using vanilla beans, keep them tightly wrapped (first in plastic, then in foil) in the refrigerator.

Vinegar

All the vinegars called for in this book are wine vinegars. Good vinegar can be hard to find and, when you do find it, it's expensive. The best vinegar I've found is Banyuls vinegar (*vinaigre de banyuls*) but, again, it's hard to find and expensive. Champagne vinegar is a good all-round white wine vinegar. Sherry vinegar, especially if it's been aged, is usually of excellent quality. Balsamic vinegar, when authentic, is extremely expensive and isn't really meant for cooking. Inexpensive balsamic vinegar can be boiled down by half to give it more body and intensify its flavor. Although perhaps not simple, the best solution is to buy yourself an oak barrel and make your own vinegar by adding the ends of bottles of wine to the cask and keeping the cask in a warm place. In any case, buy the best (which is often the most expensive) vinegar you can find.

Flavored vinegars, such as tarragon vinegar, are made by infusing herbs or other flavorful ingredients in wine vinegar. Don't confuse flavored vinegars with vinegars that are actually made from different fruits or grains, such as cider vinegar or rice vinegar.

Wine

When white wine is called for, use a dry wine, preferably one with a lot of acidity. Sauvignon blanc is good and generic ones from France are very reasonable. Red wine should have a lot of body. Argentinean wines, especially Malbecs, are inexpensive and perfect for cooking. When using sherry, buy a dry fino or amontillado, which is simply an aged fino.

PANTRY

While the emphasis in this book is on fresh foods, it helps to have certain foods handy in the pantry. This is especially useful when cooking for unexpected guests.

- Anchovies
- Baking powder
- Baking soda (keep for only one year)
- Beans (dried)

- Capers: Capers come both packed in vinegar brine or packed with salt. If you're using capers packed in brine, just drain them before you rinse them. Salt-packed capers should be rinsed off before you use them.
- Chiles (dried and canned chipotles in adobo sauce)
- Cornmeal: You'll find that cornmeal comes in fine, medium, and coarse grains. Most of the time these can be used interchangeably.
- Flour (just all-purpose white; whole wheat is too perishable to store for long periods.)
- Jam
- Lentils (dried)
- Olive oil (pure and extra virgin)
- Pasta (dried)
- Pepper (just black will do; white is nice for cream soups)
- Rice (short-grain for risotto; long-grain, especially basmati, for other dishes)
- Salts (ideally a variety, but one—just plain fine salt—will do)
- Spices (including cloves, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, cardamom, and nutmeg, ground or whole. (If whole, you'll have to grind them yourself in a coffee grinder.)
- Sugar (granulated and confectioners')
- Tomatoes (canned)
- Vanilla (extract will do, but beans are nice)
- Vinegars (white wine, red wine, sherry, balsamic)

EQUIPMENT

You can survive with very little kitchen equipment, but a few lesser-known items are surprisingly essential or will save you an enormous amount of work. Vegetable slicers and peelers, food mills, and of course sharp knives, will prove almost essential. Much of the other equipment listed here you'll be able to get around with a little improvisation.

Baking Dishes

An assortment of baking dishes in various sizes and shapes is almost essential for cooking a number of dishes. Pyrex is good (it typically comes in 8-inch squares and in 9 by 13-inch rectangles), and oval copper gratin dishes are lovely and can be used both for cooking and presenting at the table. Oval copper gratin dishes come in assorted sizes and aren't as expensive as you might think because the copper isn't that thick. Porcelain is also good for

quiche dishes and soufflé dishes. Soufflé dishes come in assorted sizes and can be used for individual servings or for serving a small group.

Baking Sheets

Your best bet is to buy half-sheet pans (one is enough but two are better) from a restaurant supply store. They'll be made of aluminum and they'll be cheap. They come in a standard size, about 13 by 17 inches. You may want to invest in nonstick sheet pans, but an even better idea is a reusable silicone mat to which nothing ever sticks. Their only disadvantage is that they're a bit expensive.

If your baking sheets are thin, and many of them are, you may want to double them up to help them cook evenly. You can even go as far as sprinkling the bottom one with water to help prevent the bottom of cookies or other pastries from burning. If you're feeling flush, you may want to buy French baking sheets, which are made of iron and are of a thicker gauge, so they cook more evenly with less likelihood of burning.

Blenders

If you don't have a food mill, a blender is imperative for pureeing soups and sauces. There are two types: the regular blender with a stand and the immersion blender.

If you are buying a stand blender, choose one with a solid, heavy base and only two or three settings—not one with twenty different buttons for pureeing. Those with fewer settings are usually better made. When using a blender to puree hot mixtures, never fill it more than halfway full and hold the top on firmly with your hand wrapped in a towel. This prevents the mixture from shooting out and burning you.

If you blend soups or sauces with any regularity, I highly recommend an immersion blender. This is a long rod with blender blades attached to one end. You can submerge an immersion blender in a soup or sauce and puree it, without the cumbersome moving from blender to pot.

Bowls

Buy a set of inexpensive mixing bowls in glass, glazed pottery, or stainless steel. I don't know if they make aluminum bowls, but if they do, avoid them because they discolor eggs.

If you like making sponge cakes or soufflés, you'll find that egg whites beaten in a copper bowl retain their height better after baking. If you don't have a copper bowl insert for your stand mixer, you may want to get one for beating egg whites. If you want to beat your egg whites by hand, buy the largest copper bowl you can find (small ones are decorative, but because they limit the motion of the whisk, they make beating more difficult). Clean the bowl with a handful of salt and a splash of vinegar each time you use it. Make sure it's perfectly clean (rinse it after the salt process) and dry before using.

Cookie Cutters

The best approach is to buy a set of fluted cutters and a set of plain cutters. There are usually about twelve cutters in a set and they vary in size from about 4 inches in diameter to ½ inch in diameter. These are almost essential for cutting out biscuits and cookies.

Cutting Boards

Not so many years ago, all restaurants were compelled to replace their wooden cutting boards with plastic. But not long after that, it was discovered that wooden boards harbor less bacteria and are therefore safer.

You'll need at least two cutting boards: a small one for slicing lemons, mincing shallots and so on, and a large one for chopping herbs, meat, fish, and so on. Buy cutting boards without feet of any sort so you can turn the board over and use both sides. Some people go so far as to label the side of the board they use for garlic or onions. One side of your large cutting board should have a moat around it for catching the juices of roasts.

Drum Sieve

This is a bit of an exotic item—essentially a wooden or metal ring with a sheet of fine mesh metal or nylon screen pulled over it—but nothing works like a drum sieve for making purees perfectly smooth. Wooden drum sieves with nylon mesh are less expensive than metal drum sieves. Unfortunately, they don't allow you to change the screen, so when they wear out they're finished. Metal drum sieves, on the other hand, allow you to insert different mesh screens. The metal screens never seem to wear out.

Dutch Ovens

A Dutch oven is a large pot or kettle, often made of cast-iron, with a tight-fitting lid. Such pots are great to have around for slow-cooked braised dishes, such as the [pot roast](#). The Creuset brand makes excellent enamel-coated Dutch ovens. A large oval Dutch oven is perfect for most pot roasts, but ideally the Dutch oven should match the size of the pot roast as closely as possible.

Food Mill

Many people think of this device as an anachronism but, in fact, it's the perfect gadget for pureeing and straining at the same time. It's very useful for making soups and for sauces such as tomato sauce or tomatillo sauce. When buying a food mill, buy the largest one you can find. (There are beautiful tin-coated large ones from France but they're hard to find and expensive.) It should have removable inserts to make purees with different textures.

Food Processor

While not essential, these make short work of many kitchen tasks, especially when it comes to pureeing solid mixtures. (Don't buy miniature food processors—their motors aren't strong enough.)

Grills

Grills come in various shapes and sizes. The least expensive are little hibachis that sit on the ground. These are good to have because they typically have heavy metal bars that form the grill (which leave distinctive grill marks), and the distance of the grill from the coals can be controlled. The disadvantage to hibachis is their size (of course you can always use two) and

the fact that they have no cover.

Most typical on people's patios is the classic Weber kettle grill, which has a cover. The disadvantage to this design is the grill grate, which is made of thin metal, almost like thin wire, and the fact that the distance of the grate from the coals can't be controlled. Weber now makes some more expensive grills that have the requisite heavy metal grill grate and leave the distinctive grill marks.

Gas grills are becoming increasingly popular and for good reason. They impart as much grilled flavor as briquettes. The one disadvantage is that many don't allow you to burn wood or sawdust to impart a distinctive flavor to grilled foods.

Kitchen Towels

Don't buy terry cloth, which catches on fire very easily. One trick used by professional cooks is to use towels as pot holders. Wearing a towel tucked into the apron keeps it always handy.

Knives

One can hardly imagine cooking without knives. They come in all shapes and sizes and price ranges, all enough to leave us baffled. Fortunately, you really only need two knives to do most essential cooking tasks (what an awful word).

First, you'll need a chef's knife, which will be your most important investment. The length will depend on your preference, but I recommend going a couple of inches longer than you may feel comfortable with—at first. A 10- to 12-inch blade knife is usually best. The length makes it easier to chop bunches of herbs, vegetables, and other ingredients quickly and easily.

Second, you'll need a paring knife with a 3-inch blade. It will come in handy for peeling.

When buying a knife, don't start out with an expensive German knife, but try knives that can be had for a third of that price. Most knives are stainless steel these days, which has the advantage of not staining certain vegetables or eggs. Stainless steel is very hard to sharpen, and it sometimes seems true that less expensive knives, made from softer steel, are easier to sharpen in this regard. You can always go with carbon knives (which are easier to sharpen and are among my favorites), but they are hard to find, they rust easily, and, again, stain certain foods. You may want a narrow-blade boning knife, if you cut up a lot of meat, and a carving knife (with as long a blade as possible) for slicing roasts. Last, if you cut up fish, you may want a flexible filleting knife.

Ladles

Have at least two sizes: a 2-ounce and a 6- or 8-ounce. The small size is convenient for working mixtures through strainers (a ladle works much more efficiently than a spoon) and for ladling out sauces. The large size is handy for ladling soups and broths.

Measuring Cups and Spoons

There are two types of measuring cups: dry and liquid. The dry measuring cups are designed to allow you to sweep the straight edge of a knife across the top to create an exact measurement. The liquid measuring cups are transparent, have excess capacity to allow you to fill up to

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