

COOK'S

ILLUSTRATED

Baking Book

BAKING DEMYSTIFIED

WITH 450 FOOLPROOF RECIPES FROM
AMERICA'S MOST TRUSTED FOOD MAGAZINE



THE COOK'S ILLUSTRATED

Baking Book

**Baking Demystified—with 450 Recipes from
America's Most Trusted Food Magazine**

THE EDITORS AT AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

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Welcome to America's Test Kitchen

This book has been tested, written, and edited by the folks at America's Test Kitchen, a very real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside of Boston. It is the home of *Cook's Illustrated* magazine and *Cook's Country* magazine and is the Monday-through-Friday destination for more than three dozen test cooks, editors, food scientists, tasters, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes over and over again until we understand how and why they work and until we arrive at the "best" version.

We start the process of testing a recipe with a complete lack of conviction, which means that we accept no claim, no theory, no technique, and no recipe at face value. We simply assemble as many variations as possible, test a half-dozen of the most promising, and taste the results blind. We then construct our own hybrid recipe and continue to test it, varying ingredients, techniques, and cooking times until we reach a consensus. The result, we hope, is the best version of a particular recipe, but we realize that only you can be the final judge of our success (or failure). As we like to say in the test kitchen, "We make the mistakes, so you don't have to."

All of this would not be possible without a belief that good cooking, much like good music, is indeed based on a foundation of objective technique. Some people like spicy foods and others don't, but there is a right way to sauté, there is a best way to cook a pot roast, and there are measurable scientific principles involved in producing perfectly beaten, stable egg whites. This is our ultimate goal: to investigate the fundamental principles of cooking so that you become a better cook. It is as simple as that.

You can watch us work (in our actual test kitchen) by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchenTV.com) or *Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountryTV.com) on public television, or by subscribing to *Cook's Illustrated* magazine (CooksIllustrated.com) or *Cook's Country* magazine (CooksCountry.com). We welcome you into our kitchen, where you can stand by our side as we test our way to the "best" recipes in America.

Preface

Baking, unlike the rest of cooking, is like the Apollo missions. Everything has to be thought through in advance since it is nearly impossible to make mid-course corrections. If you have used the wrong amount of leavener, the wrong flour, or perhaps the wrong amount of fat or liquid, all you can do is pray once the cakes go into the oven. This is, of course, not true of stir-fries, stews, soups, or almost any other stovetop supper; adjustments can be made throughout.

As with space exploration, developing baking recipes is not a hit-or-miss process, nor is it a study in improvisation—it requires a well-staffed test kitchen and lots of time. What is the best way to thicken a peach pie to get clean slices that are not heavy with flavor-dulling thickener? What is the best way to bake up chewy chocolate chip cookies with crisp edges? How do you make a pie dough that is both easy to roll and flaky and tender? What about a pizza dough that is easy to roll out and is also thin and crisp? And how do you know when a cake or loaf of bread is done?

Like any well-trained engineer, our test cooks not only test variations on recipes, but also observe results and ask questions. What’s the best way to beat egg whites for an angel food cake? Why does pizza dough retract when stretched? How can one incorporate more bananas into banana bread without ruining its texture? Why do the blueberries in blueberry Bundt cake always sink to the bottom during baking and add little fruit flavor? What causes some cookies to turn out crispy and others to turn out cakey or chewy? What difference does it make in a recipe to melt butter rather than cream it? Like all scientists, we are often wrong but we have the luxury of time, since we spend weeks and weeks developing most of our recipes so virtually every theory can be tested.

So what you are now holding in your hand is not just a cookbook, it’s a scientific journey through the world of baking. It’s not a hodgepodge of our favorite recipes; it reflects over 20 years of scientific testing and tasting to find the best methods and the best recipes. You can find 500 free recipes for New York cheesecake or sugar cookies online; the question is, which of them will actually work? (The answer is, not many.) When it comes to baking, you need the experience and knowledge of a test kitchen at your side, providing you with all of the answers to your questions so that each and every recipe will come out perfectly, the first time and every time.

It’s true that some things in the kitchen are self-evident. You hardly need a cookbook to tell you to preheat the oven properly (although some cooks do overlook this simple step) or set out all of your baking ingredients before starting. That reminds me of the Vermont story of Frank Skidmore, who died with a large account in the local savings bank; his heirs contested his will in court. The slick city lawyer for the plaintiffs asked a neighbor whether he had ever heard the deceased talking to himself when he was alone. The Vermonter replied, “Come to think of it, I was never with Mr. Skidmore when he was alone!” So there!

Hopefully, we don’t take too much time stating the obvious. Instead, we hope that this volume gives you a detailed, highly useful tour of the world of home baking, answering your questions and helping you to turn out delicious baked goods. That way, you won’t end up talking to yourself about why a cake or cookie recipe failed!

Cordially,
Christopher Kimball
Founder and Editor
America’s Test Kitchen

Navigating this E-Book

This eBook includes a [Table of Contents](#) that allows you to jump to any chapter. And each chapter has its own table of contents with links to every recipe in the chapter.

We have also created a [Recipe Index](#) that lists all the recipes in the book, divided by chapter, in one place. You can access the Recipe Index from the Table of Contents. (It also appears at the end of the book.) Each title in the Recipe Index is a link that will take you directly to that recipe.

This cookbook is filled with sidebars. Throughout the book there are links to this material where appropriate.

Most eBook reading devices also offer a search function that allows you to type in exactly what you are looking for. Please read the documentation for your particular eBook reader for more information on its search function and any other navigational features it may offer.

BAKING BASICS

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CORE INGREDIENTS

Each year, the test kitchen goes through, on average, 2,500 pounds of flour, 2,000 pounds of sugar, 600 pounds of butter, and 850 dozen eggs for our recipe development and testing. In addition to running up an impressive grocery bill, we have developed some well-formed opinions about these ingredients. Here's what you need to know. (See our [Shopping Guide](#) for more information on rounding out your baking pantry, including information on our top-rated brands.)

Flour

Bakers should really keep three flours—all-purpose, cake, and bread—on hand. Why? The protein content varies significantly among the three. Therefore, these flours will absorb water differently—the same amount of water might make a soupy batter with a cup of cake flour but a nice, firm dough with bread flour. Protein content also affects gluten development. More protein leads to more gluten, which, in turn, can translate to coarseness, chewiness, toughness, or crispness. Depending on the recipe, these traits might be desirable or not. Note that your choices of flour are not just limited to three.

~~**ALL-PURPOSE FLOUR** is by far the most versatile flour available. Its protein content (10 to 11.7 percent, depending on the brand. King Arthur is close to 11.7 percent, Pillsbury and Gold Medal around 10.5 percent) provides enough structure to make good sandwich bread, yet it's light enough to use for cakes of a medium-to-coarse crumb. We prefer unbleached flour. Bleached flours in our tests did not perform as well as the unbleached flours and were sometimes criticized for tasting flat or carrying off-flavors.~~



Pillsbury

BEST

Since 1869

All Purpose Flour

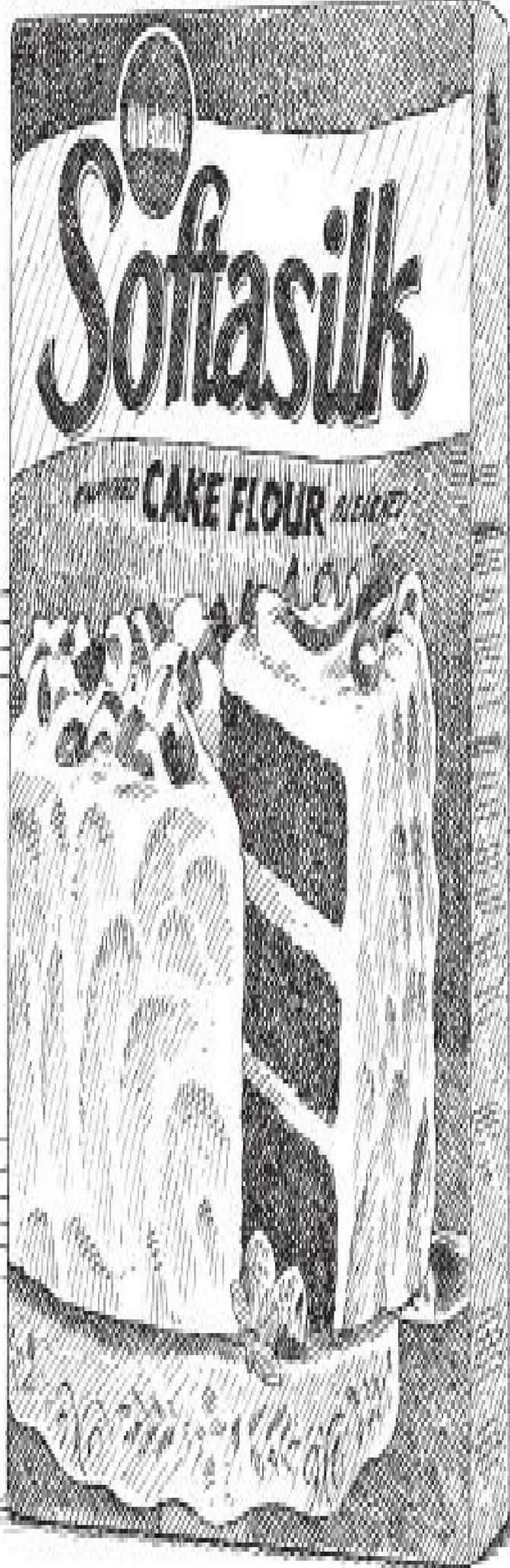
BIG SAVINGS

The Great Recipes

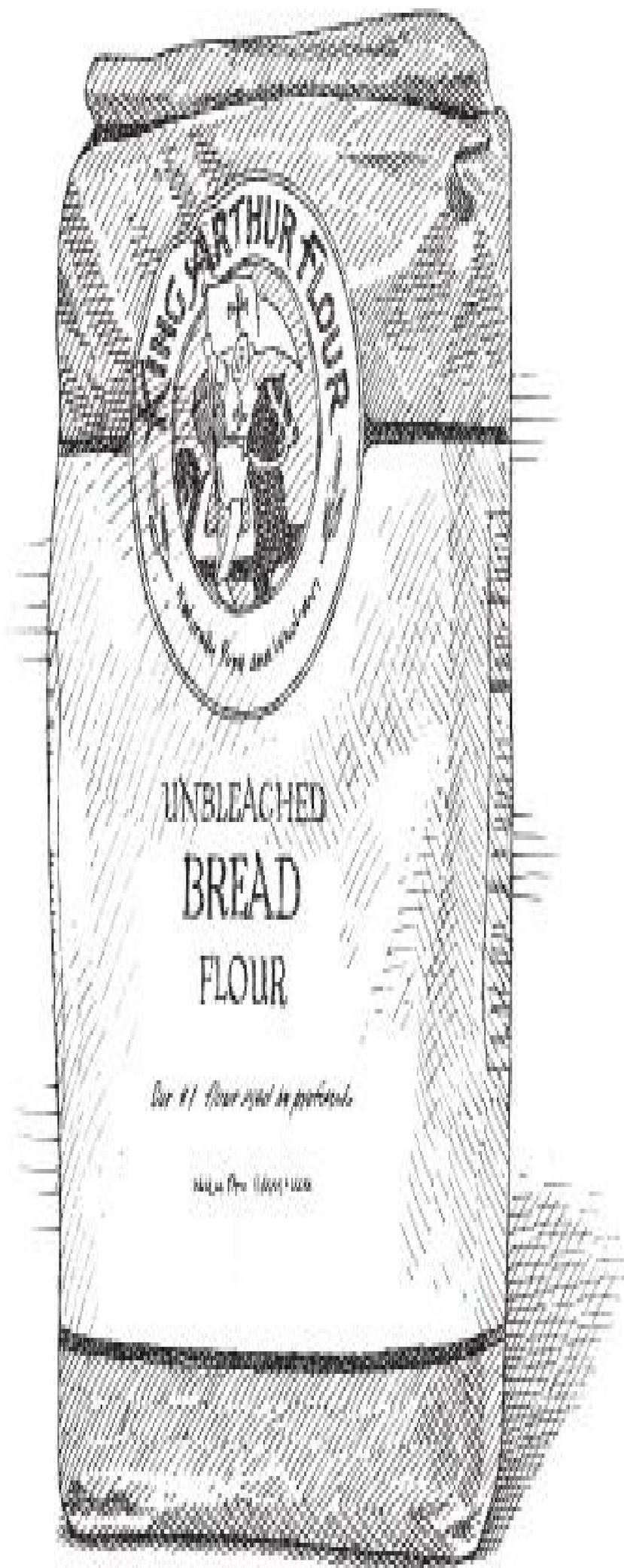
Bleached-Enriched Pre-Sifted

NET WT 5 LB (2.27 kg)

CAKE FLOUR has a low protein content—about 6 to 8 percent—and thus yields cakes and pastries with less gluten, which translates to a finer, more delicate crumb. We use cake flour for light cakes, such as pound cake and angel food cake. One note: Most cake flour is bleached, which affects the starches in flour so that it can absorb greater amounts of liquid and fat. Most cakes have so much sugar and fat it's very hard to detect any off-notes in the flour caused by the bleaching process. It is possible to approximate 1 cup of cake flour by using 2 tablespoons of cornstarch plus $\frac{7}{8}$ cup of all-purpose flour.



~~**BREAD FLOUR** has a protein content of about 12 percent to 14 percent, meaning it develops a lot of gluten to provide strong, chewy structure for rustic breads. For sandwich breads we prefer using all-purpose flour for a softer crumb.~~



UNBLEACHED
BREAD
FLOUR

Our #1 Flour sold in preference

MILLS OF THE FLOUR COMPANY

WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR is made from all three parts of the wheat kernel—the endosperm as well as the fiber-rich bran, or outer shell, and the tiny, vitamin-packed germ. The presence of the germ and bran in whole-wheat flour makes it not only more nutritious and more flavorful, but also more dense and less able to rise. We generally don't like breads or baked goods made with 100 percent whole-wheat flour; they are more dense and can be sour-tasting. Instead, we rely on a combination of all-purpose flour and whole-wheat flour in most recipes.



PREMIUM 100%
WHOLE WHEAT
FLOUR



MADE IN THE U.S.A.
NATURALLY PURE AND NATURAL

NET WT. 5 LBS.

OTHER SPECIALTY FLOURS

PASTRY FLOUR is a soft wheat flour with a protein content between that of all-purpose flour and cake flour. It is often used in pie crusts, tart pastry, scones, and other similarly buttery baked goods (such as biscuits and shortbread). While it performs well in these applications, we don't think it's worth stocking pastry flour unless you are a professional baker.

SELF-RISING FLOUR contains a leavener and is made from a soft flour that brings it closer to cake flour than all-purpose. We've found the convenience of self-rising flour to be pretty minor and recommend using cake flour in recipes that call for self-rising flour and adding the baking powder and salt yourself. The formula is 1½ teaspoons of baking powder and ½ teaspoon of salt for every cup of flour.

STORING FLOUR

Refined flours, including all-purpose, bread, and cake flour, can be stored in airtight containers in your pantry for up to one year. Whole-wheat flour and others made from whole grains contain more fat than refined flours and can turn rancid quickly at room temperature. For this reason, we recommend storing these flours in the freezer. In various tests, we found that using flour straight from the freezer inhibited rise and yielded denser baked goods. Therefore, it's important to bring chilled flour to room temperature before baking. To quickly accomplish this, spread the flour in a thin layer on a baking sheet and let it sit for about 30 minutes.

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