

## 5 Easy Ways to Enjoy Successful Baking Projects

Baking is a wonderful way to fill kitchens with tantalizing aromas and tummies with satisfying whole grain breads, rolls, and muffins, as well as cakes, cookies, and bars. Family baking projects are also great ways to teach cooking skills to children and to create lifetime food memories. Here are five tips to make every project a winner.

### 1. Follow directions precisely.

While cooking can be a delightfully creative outlet for many people, **baking is one place to follow recipes exactly.** Successful baking projects are a careful balance of ingredients and temperature combined in a precise sequence. Changing any one of these factors can result in baking failures: cakes that fall, bread that is tough, or cookies that ooze all over the pan.

### 2. Heat the oven correctly.

Most baked recipes call for the oven to be **pre-heated** so that the temperature is right when you put the item in. For most ovens, this takes about 10 minutes, so turn on the oven as you begin to measure and mix ingredients. Expert bakers often use an **oven thermometer** (around \$6) to insure correct temperatures. This is especially important as ovens get older.

### 3. Measure accurately.

In terms of measurements, **some ingredients are more critical than others.** Leavening agents (ingredients that help baked goods to rise) are especially important. These include baking powder, baking soda, and yeast. When making yeast breads and rolls, take special care with sugar and salt, since these help control the growth of yeast.

### 4. Combine carefully.

The way that ingredients are combined is another key to getting the right texture. Here are three common terms and their meanings. **Beat** is to stir quickly and completely to add air into the mixture. **Blend** is to stir together until just combined (the mixture may be lumpy). **Mix** is to stir until the ingredients are thoroughly combined and uniform in texture.

### 5. Substitute sensibly.

While it's easy to substitute one vegetable for another in a casserole or salad, baking is a different story. Substitutions can be made, but the replacement ingredient must be able to provide the same function. For a long list of basic ingredient substitutions and other cooking tips, visit Nebraska Extension at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciqsubs.shtml>.