

QUICK KITCHEN TIPS

By Weber County Food \$ense Nutrition Education Program

Aside from menu planning, freeze ahead meals, and the slow cooker, here are some ideas for saving time in the kitchen when it comes to preparing food.

Fruit and Vegetable Tips

Zesting a lemon: Before using a lemon, lime or orange, zest it with a micro grater and freeze it for future use. Citrus zests better when cool. If only using a small amount of lemon, poke a hole with a skewer and squeeze. Use your citrus at room temperature or microwave it for 10 to 15 seconds then roll for maximum juice. No juicer or juice reamer? Use the back of a spoon to juice the half.

Zippering leaves off kale or Swiss chard: Holding stem and pinch leaves between index and thumb, then pull.

Keep potatoes from budding: Place an apple in the bag with the potatoes.

Easy potato peeling: Clean and wash potato, then lightly score with a knife around the middle of the potato. Boil as needed. Once cooked, place in a bowl of ice water. Wait a few seconds, then taking the potato in both hands, twist gently in opposite directions at the score line. The skin will come right off and the potato will be ready to use.

Slicing a potato or a round fruit or vegetable: Cut a small slice off one side to give a flat side for safer cutting.

Keep raw cut potatoes from going gray: Cover them in cold water. They will last until the next day, but will lose some of their water-soluble vitamins. However, this is great for Thanksgiving preparation.

Warm mashed potatoes in a slow cooker: It helps save on stove and oven space. It can also be used for stuffing/dressing.

Save over-salted soup or sauces: Put a raw potato in over-salted soup or sauces to soak up some of the extra salt.

Revive wilted produce: Don't throw it away. Put it in ice water for 15 to 20 minutes. It will stiffen it up again. To keep your veggie tray crisp before an event, cover with a damp paper towel and wrap with plastic. It can be stored that way for up to 12 hours.

Keep slime away in refrigerator produce drawer: Place several layers of paper towels in the bottom of the produce drawer of your refrigerator.

Keep bananas from spoiling so quickly: Bananas spoil less quickly if they are kept in a bunch. Also, do not store bananas with any other fruit. The gasses they emit will ripen the other fruit faster than normal.

Need a soft fruit or vegetable sliced quickly? Use your pastry cutter. It works well with avocados, strawberries and bananas.

Tired of too many gadgets? Here is an easy way to core an apple. Sit it on its bottom and slice off a piece close to the core, then place on flat side. Slice off the other two sides; then turn on side and slice last section off. No core and great pieces for slicing smaller or dicing.

Peel a garlic clove: Try one of these methods:

- Put the clove in the **microwave** on HIGH for 10-12 seconds. Skins peel right off.
- Use a **rubber jar opener**. Lay clove in the middle of rubber jar opener and fold it over the clove. Rub clove vigorously and skin comes right off.
- Use a **large knife** and lay the blade horizontally across the clove. Place one hand carefully on the blade and **push down** with your hand cracking open the clove. The skin comes right off.

How to chop garlic: No more struggling with sticky, paper-thin peels. With these three steps—trim, crush, chop—you can prep a clove in no time.

1. Trim: Use the tip of the chef's knife to slice off the hard root of each clove. This will allow the skin to peel away more easily.

2. **Crush:** Place a clove under the flat side of the knife, with the blade facing away from you. Press the heel of your palm or your fist down on the knife until you feel the clove give way. Slip off and discard the skin.
3. **Chop:** Gather together the peeled cloves, hold your knife by the handle, and place your other, nondominant hand on top of the blade. Rock, the knife up and down through the cloves (the tip stays on the cutting board). Chop until the garlic is the size you desire.

Storing leftover tomato paste: Most recipes for pasta sauce and chili call for only a couple of tablespoons of tomato paste. If your paste comes in a tube, leftovers aren't a problem. But, if it's in a can, don't toss the remainder or let it dry out in the refrigerator. Instead, freeze it in tablespoon-size portions in an ice cube tray. Once they're solid, transfer the cubes to a plastic freezer bag. Later add them directly to recipes—no need to thaw. Try this with chipotles in adobo and pesto, too.

Prevent mushrooms from getting slimy by wrapping them in paper towels before refrigerating or store them in brown paper bags.

Cutting corn from the cob: Minimize waste and mess when cutting corn from the cob by mounting the cob in the hollow center of a Bundt cake pan, where it will be secure. When you run a knife down the cob, kernels will collect in the pan.

Turn leftover mashed potatoes into croquettes: Form cold mashed potatoes into little balls, dip in beaten egg, coat in bread crumbs, and sauté or bake. You can also mix in other veggies or cooked meat.

Leftover guacamole: If you have leftover guacamole, spray it with just a bit of cooking spray before you refrigerate it. The oils from the cooking spray will help to keep your guacamole from turning brown. You can also keep the pit from the avocado in the guacamole because the pit contains natural oils that will also help to preserve it and keep it from turning brown.

Keep berries longer: Soaking berries in a vinegar and water solution before you store them in the

refrigerator will make them last for several days longer than simply putting them in the fridge. Just add one part vinegar to 10 parts water and swirl the berries around for just a few seconds. Rinse and store.

Keep bananas from ripening too fast: Wrap the crown of a banana bunch with plastic wrap to keep the bunch from ripening too fast.

Mashing potatoes: When making mashed potatoes, after you drain the potatoes, return them to the hot pan, cover tightly and let steam for 5 minutes. This allows the potatoes to dry out so they'll mash to a beautiful texture and soak up the butter and cream more easily.

Baking Tips

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.

Freeze butter to make it easier when cutting into dry ingredients.

Hold stuffed peppers upright in a greased muffin tin.

Grease muffin tins, cookie sheets or cake and bread pans easily: Use a 1-1/2 inch natural bristle paintbrush dipped in melted margarine or oil to grease muffin tins, cookie sheets or cake and bread pans. It's much faster than using a skimpy pastry brush.

When working with dough, don't flour your hands; coat them with olive oil to prevent sticking.

Flour a cake pan: Use a bit of the dry mix instead of flour. There won't be any white mess on the outside of the cake.

Brush beaten egg whites over pie crust before baking to yield a beautiful glossy finish.

Meatloaf in a hurry: Form meatloaf mixture into small individual-sized portions and bake the meatballs for 10 minutes on HIGH in the microwave.

Shape meatballs: Shaping meatballs is a snap... once meat mixture is well mixed, use a small melon ball scoop or a cookie dough scoop to form the meatballs. Then bake on a cookie sheet in the oven for 20 minutes at 375° F.

Easy Homemade Bread Crumbs: Making your own is a great way to use up the heels of old loaves. Stow the pieces in a large plastic bag in the freezer. When the bag is full, cut the bread into large chunks and pulse them in a food processor until you have fine crumbs. Toast the crumbs on a rimmed baking sheet in a 350° F. oven, tossing once, until dry, 4 to 6 minutes. Use the crumbs to bread cutlets, make meatballs, or add crunch to casseroles. The crumbs will keep in the freezer for up to 6 months.

Miscellaneous Tips

Snipped herbs: Use kitchen shears to cut and snip fresh herbs in a hurry. Simply place rinsed clean herbs in a small deep bowl and snip away.

Cube a soft cheese (like cream cheese or Brie): Freeze it first for 20-30 minutes.

Freeze cookie dough: 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) and then just slice off and bake.

Slicing meat thin: If you need really thin sliced meat when cooking stir-fry recipes or other dishes, try partially freezing the meat before making your cuts. This will make the meat easier to slice very thin since it will hold firm while slicing.

Brown ground beef: Crumble 3-4 pounds of ground beef on a jelly roll pan. Season to your preference. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Drain with a turkey baster if meat juices are high.

Do all cutting at one time: If you know you'll be using onion three nights this week, chop enough onion for all three meals, then it's ready when you need it later in the week.

Shred cheese yourself all at once: Since it's more cost efficient to buy cheese in a block and shred it yourself than buying it preshredded, shred the whole block and put it in a zip storage bag in the refrigerator or freezer.

Store oils in a squeeze bottle: Olive oil or other oils stored in a squeeze bottle keep the oils handy for use and the dribbles down the side to a minimum.

Hamburger patties: Form a nice-sized roll of ground beef, wrap and freeze. Once frozen, slice for patties. Works like a charm for perfectly formed patties.

Make your own mixes: Recipes abound for all kinds of time-saving mixes. Devoting one day a month to making mixes will save you lots of time in meal preparation.

Chopped bacon: Freeze bacon to make it chop easier for some recipes. (Or, buy the bags of precooked chopped bacon...not expensive and saves a lot of mess and time.)

Holding a cutting board in place: A board that slides around the counter while you're chopping is an accident waiting to happen. Keep yours anchored with a cut-to-fit piece of rug pad or shelf liner. (The added cushioning also helps stabilize a slightly warmed board.) Wash in the top rack of the dishwasher as necessary.

Keep herbs tasting fresh: You can keep herbs tasting fresh for up to a month by storing them in whole bunches washed and sealed in plastic bags in the freezer. When you need them, they'll be easier to chop, and they'll defrost the minute they hit a hot pan. You can also freeze fresh cut herbs in ice cube trays in olive oil. They are perfect for adding to sauces, stews, and even sautéing vegetables and meats.

To save a scorched pan, sprinkle the burned bottom with baking soda or cream of tartar, then add four to five tablespoons salt, plus enough water to cover, and let stand overnight. Scrape out charred remains with a rubber spatula.

Keep cheese from molding: Dip a large piece of cheesecloth in vinegar, ring out and wrap blocks of cheese to keep mold from forming.

Seal plastic bags: If you have plastic bottles left over, you can use them to seal up plastic bags. Just cut the top portion off about 2” down the neck, and use it to seal the bag. If you are storing produce, it is important to keep it sealed so that oxygen does not get through. Just place the cut off section inside the bag and replace the lid, ensuring that you have it sealed up nicely.

Keep milk fresh longer: Add a pinch or two of salt to milk or cream to last longer. It will not affect the taste.

Separate bacon easily: Roll your bacon into tube while still in the package. Roll it to both the inside then the outside. This will loosen up the bacon so the strips just peel right off and make it easy to separate them for cooking.

Cleaning

Rub the rust off of your cookware with a half a lemon dipped in salt.

Scrub your kitchen sink: Squeeze the juice out of three lemons and mix with salt until you get a paste. Drop some of the paste into the sink and gently scrub the sink with it. Rinse after scrubbing.

Clean your microwave: Squeeze enough lemons to yield 4 tablespoons of juice. Fill a 4 cup capacity bowl with 1 cup of water and the lemon juice. Place

the bowl in a microwave and turn it to a high setting. Let the mixture steam up inside of the microwave. Wipe down the microwave.

Get stains off of countertops: Pour some lemon juice on top of the stain. Wait a few minutes while the lemon juice's acid works to break down the stain. Sprinkle a bit of baking soda on top of the stain and scrub the stain away.

Use baking soda as an effective degreaser: Sprinkle it on the grease and rub with a dry cloth. The baking soda will absorb the grease and you can now simply rinse it away.

Keep drains flowing: Mix equal amounts baking soda and vinegar, at least a 1/2 cup of each. Pour it down your drain, let sit for a few minutes and rinse it down with a kettle of boiling water. You will prevent many common drain problems if you make this a regular part of drain maintenance.

Loosen mineral deposits on sink faucets: Soak a paper towel in undiluted vinegar and place it on sink faucets.

Make an all-purpose cleaner: Mix 1 cup of vinegar with 5 cups of water to make a window, eyeglass lens or surface cleaner. It won't kill bacteria though, so be sure to use a disinfectant on contaminated surfaces.

Treat carpet spills, such as coffee or soda: Dampen a clean cloth with vinegar and dab the spot to remove excess liquid. Dampen another clean cloth with vinegar. Using cold water (never hot) and the vinegar, gently rub the spot until the stain is gone.

Remove stains from porcelain: Rub a porcelain surface (sink, tub, commode) with cream of tartar and watch the stains disappear.

