

A mini-glossary for new cooks

Al dente. Cooked “to the tooth,” tender but firm.

Bake. A method of cooking by dry heat, usually in the oven and most often involving flour.

Batter. A mixture, usually for baking, that is thin enough to stir easily or even to pour.

Beat. Stir vigorously to combine ingredients and/or incorporate air.

Blend. Combine ingredients thoroughly.

Boil. Heat liquid until bubbles rise to surface and burst.

Braise. A method of cooking by moist heat. Frequently involves an initial step for browning and then slow cooking in liquid or moist environment.

Broil. A method of cooking by direct dry heat, such as under a broiler in an oven or over charcoal.

Chop. Cut into irregular, smallish pieces (1/2- to 1-inch).

Chop coarsely. Cut into irregular, biggish pieces (larger than 1 inch).

Cook. Change the characteristics of foodstuff by applying heat.

Cube. Cut into cube-shaped pieces, typically 1 inch or more each dimension.

Cut in. A technique for blending fat into flour.

Dice. Cut into small, cube-shaped pieces, typically 1/2 inch or so.

Done. Oh, it all depends... but in general *done* means until you don’t want to cook it any more!

Dough. A mixture, usually for baking, that is thick or stiff.

Emulsify. To suspend oil in a watery liquid, typically vinegar or egg (think mayonnaise).

Fold, or fold in. To combine ingredients by scooping underneath a mixture, lifting a portion from the bottom and laying it over the top of the mixture. Technique most often used for adding beaten egg whites into thicker mixture or for adding ingredients such as chocolate chips into thick dough.

Heat, high. On stovetop, the burner’s highest setting.

Heat, low. On stovetop, the burner’s lowest setting.

Heat, medium. On stovetop, the burner’s midpoint setting.

Heat, medium-high. On stovetop, the setting halfway between medium and high.

Heat, medium-low. On stovetop, the setting halfway between low and high.

Knead. To work dough by folding and pressing.

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Melt. To heat until liquefied.

Mince. Chop irregularly into tiny pieces.

Mix. Combine ingredients.

Optional. You don't have to do it or use it.

Packed. As in "firmly packed brown sugar" or "loosely packed basil leaves," means press ingredients into measuring cup firmly (press hard) or loosely (don't crush the things, but eliminate a bit of the air between the leaves).

Pinch. An amount you can pick up between your thumb and forefinger.

Puree. Chop, crush, or process a solid material until smooth, thick (usually) texture.

Roast. A method of cooking by dry heat, usually in the oven. The term most often applies to meats (think roast beef, roast turkey) and vegetables.

Saute. Cooking in small amount of oil in uncovered pan on stovetop over high or medium-high heat. Good for browning and crisp-tender vegetables.

Simmer. Cooking in liquid at a temperature just below a full boil; bubbles form and rise to surface but do not burst.

Steam. Method of cooking by suspending food over boiling or simmering water.

Stir. Move ingredients around in a pan or bowl, usually with a tool.

Stir-fry. Pretty much the same as sauté (above).

Sweat. Slow-cooking vegetables, especially onions, in small amount of liquid in covered or partially covered pan on stovetop until soft. No browning occurs.

To taste. As much as tastes good to you, which means you need to taste the thing to know if you have added the right amount! The term is most often applied to seasonings, including salt, pepper and herbs.

Zest. Noun: Brightly color part of citrus rind. Verb: To cut or grate that part of the rind.