

10 Steps to Becoming a Great Home Cook

NOTES	Cooking is a skill that can take a lifetime to perfect, and not every home-cooked meal is going to be a home run. However, these basic rules will drastically increase your success rate.	
	1. Know Yourself and Your Audience Never cooked a meal before? Start with preparing one or two home-cooked dinners per week. Cooking for a family of picky eaters? Include everyone in recipe selection and learn simple recipes that everyone is eager to try. In order to turn home cooking into a habit, you must set realistic expectations.	7. Use Appropriately Sized Equipment Try to sauté four chicken cutlets in a 10-inch skillet, rather than the 12-inch skillet called for in the recipe, and the chicken will steam because the pan is too crowded. It's important to be as particular about a recipe's equipment as you are about its ingredients.
	2. Be Organized in Your Planning and Shopping Think about dinner throughout the week both in terms of when and what you will cook. This will determine your shopping days and the ingredients you should buy. Bring shopping lists and always check your pantry so don't buy ingredients you already have. Keep staples like pasta, olive oil, and canned tomatoes on hand so you can get a quick dinner on the table.	8. Check Temperatures Early and Often The cooking times in recipes are meant as guidelines only. Because there are inevitably variations in ingredients and equipment, it is important to follow the visual cues provided in recipes. And don't wait until the prescribed time has elapsed to check the doneness of a particular recipe. It is good practice to start checking 5 to 10 minutes before the designated time.
	3. Read the Recipe Carefully Before Starting By reading the recipe from start to finish before you begin to cook, you will avoid any surprises along the way and will be able to use your time more efficiently. Also, make sure you understand how long something will take to prepare so that dinner is ready at the right time. 4. Follow Directions—at Least the First Time	9. Taste the Dish Before Serving You MUST taste food in order to season it successfully. We generally season food lightly throughout the cooking process and then add more salt as needed before serving. Foods that will be served chilled should be tasted again before serving. The cold temperature mutes the effect of the seasoning, so you might need to add a bit more salt, pepper, or vinegar before serving.
	Cooking is science, but it is also art. Our advice is simple: Make the recipe as directed the first time. Once you're comfortable with the recipe, you can improvise and make substitutions.	10. Learn from Your Mistakes Nobody's perfect. Even the experienced cooks in our test kitchen occasionally turn out less-than-perfect food. Repetition is key to any learning process, including
	 5. Be Prepared A recipe is a lot simpler to make when all components for it are at your fingertips. To avoid overcooking the pasta while you scramble to find a colander, prep all the necessary equipment (including preheating your oven) and all the ingredients before you start to cook. 	cooking. Don't make a different recipe every night of the year. Make a dish at least once or twice a month; try to pinpoint what went wrong when something doesn't taste right; adjust the mistake the next time you cook, and soon you will have mastered the recipe.
	6. Prepare Ingredients as Directed Be sure to prepare food as instructed in the ingredient list. Food that is prepared properly and uniformly will cook at the same rate and be more visually appealing.	





