

Chapter 1

Cooking with Confidence

In This Chapter

- ▶ Taking a good look at your kitchen
- ▶ Familiarizing yourself with some basic cooking techniques
- ▶ Figuring out your menus
- ▶ Making your kitchen safe and user-friendly
- ▶ Trying your hand at a simple recipe

Recipes in This Chapter

🍳 Scrambled Eggs



So you want to find out how to cook? Good for you! Cooking is fun, relaxing, exciting, and even therapeutic. It enables you to eat for less money than ordering take-out or dining in a restaurant every night, and it allows you to know exactly what you're eating and to make conscious, healthy food choices. Cooking lets you easily adapt your meals to suit your own nutritional and gastronomic preferences, whether you're eating low-carb or vegetarian, or you're determined to immerse yourself in classic French cuisine. Plus, cooking the food you eat puts you in closer touch to the process of nourishing your own body, and that can make you feel better about yourself, your health, your body, and your life. Yes, cooking can be that powerful!

We love to cook, and we're excited to share our knowledge with you, but we remember being beginning cooks, too. Sometimes you may not feel confident enough to try what looks like a complicated recipe, let alone figure out which equipment and supplies you need and how you should set up a kitchen that works for you.

In this chapter, we begin at the beginning: with your kitchen. Whether you have a cramped apartment kitchen with counter space the size of a cereal box, or a sprawling country kitchen with a commercial stove and a work island, this chapter helps you set up your kitchen in a way that will allow you to become a more productive cook. To be sure, space is great. But knowing how to use what you have efficiently is the real key. You would be surprised

to see how small some restaurant kitchens are; they work, however, because everything is in its place and is easily accessible. Have you ever ricocheted around the kitchen desperately searching for a spatula while your omelet burned on the range? We want to ensure that you're never in that situation again.

To do that, in this chapter, we give you a broad overview of what you need to know to be an effective cook. We talk about how to set up your cooking space, introduce you to the major appliances of a kitchen, and give you a glimpse of some basic cooking techniques. Then we discuss menu planning, kitchen safety, and we even help you to get started with a nice, easy, practical recipe.

Warming Up to Your Kitchen

There it is: the kitchen. Maybe you don't go in there very much, or maybe you like to hang around watching other people cook. Or maybe you cook dinner in there every night, but you don't enjoy it very much. Never fear. Your kitchen can easily become a place you *love* to cook in and be in. It's all a matter of organization.

Setting up your cooking space

You don't need a fabulous kitchen to prepare fabulous food. But a well-designed workplace sure makes cooking easier and more pleasurable. Chances are, you aren't in the process of remodeling your kitchen, and you have to make do with the basic kitchen design you have. But if you are designing your cooking space, consider the concept of access. If you want to spend the day running, join a health club. If you want to enjoy an efficient and pleasurable cooking experience, put some thought into the organization of your workspace. Although nothing is wrong with a large, eat-in kitchen, the design of the cooking area should be practical. You shouldn't have to walk ten feet from the stove to get the salt, for example.

You should be able to move from your working counter space to the stove and the refrigerator in a smooth, unobstructed fashion. This working space actually has a name: the *kitchen triangle* (see Figure 1-1). If a table, plant, or small child is blocking the way, move it. For suggestions on designing your kitchen, check out *Kitchen Remodeling For Dummies*, by Donald R. Prestly (Wiley). But remember, even if you can't design your kitchen space, you can arrange what you need in a way that works for you. Here's how to do that.

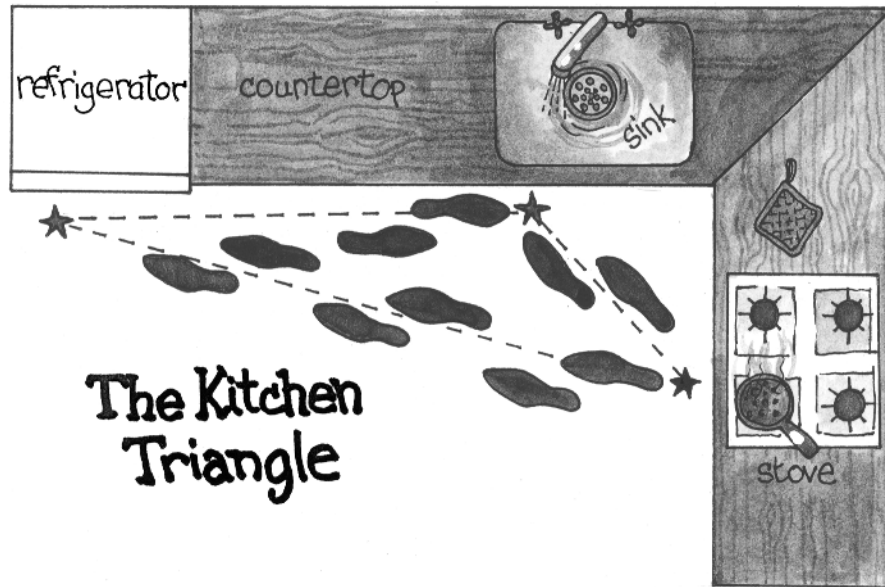


Figure 1-1:
An efficient
kitchen
triangle.

Decluttering your countertops

First things first: Take a good hard look at your countertops. What's on them? Coffeemakers, blenders, food processors, stacks of bills, permission slips, and grade school art projects? Counter space is the single most overlooked item in many kitchens. The counter is where you set out and prepare food (often on a cutting board), stack plates, put kitchen machines, and lose car keys amid the clutter. A clean, clear counter space can inspire great meals. A cluttered one is more likely to make you want to pick up the phone and order a pizza. Try to keep your counters neat and clean. So many kitchen counters are cluttered with paraphernalia that they become nearly useless.

The most important key for organizing your counter space is to keep it clear of most stuff. Unless you use an appliance at least several times a week — the coffee machine, toaster, and blender, for example — put it away. That's precious work space you're filling up with all that stuff! Also remember that a kitchen counter is not a magazine rack, plant holder, wine bin, or phone book shelf, so try not to use it for these purposes if you actually want to cook!

In addition to keeping your countertops clutter free, take steps to care for them. Use cutting boards for cutting and trivets for hot pots and pans, and wipe up spills quickly to prevent stains. The nicer your counters look, the more you'll enjoy being in the kitchen. (Flip ahead to Chapter 22 for more information about countertop care.)

Let there be lighting

Kitchens should be well lit — the stove and workspaces most of all. If you have a combination kitchen/dining area, you may want to put the lights on a dimmer. That way, you can keep the kitchen bright while the dining area is dim. Lights under the stovetop hood can really help when stirring sauces or sautéing vegetables. You haven't replaced that burned-out bulb in a year? Time to do it!

Another option is to have special lighting for the cooking area, either inset into overhead cabinets or in the ceiling. Nothing is worse than trying to check your food in a dimly lit area. If your kitchen is poorly lit over the cooking area, the least expensive solution is a wall-mounted supplementary light.

Staple city: Organizing your pantry

The pantry is the place where you store your basic cooking staples, as well as other dry goods. Dry goods are foods that aren't refrigerated or frozen, including staples like flour and sugar, and packaged foods like crackers, cookies, pasta, and rice. If you're lucky enough to have an entire room or closet dedicated to a pantry, keep it well organized so that you can see and easily reach the staples you use most, like flour, sugar, and cooking oil. But even if you have only a cabinet or two for your pantry, organization is the key to efficiency. (For tips on what to keep in your pantry, turn to Chapter 3.)

The first thing to consider in organizing your pantry is the kind of closet or cabinet you decide to use and whether the food you store inside of it is easily accessible.

We've seen many ingenious kitchen cabinets on the market, such as those that have storage shelves on the swing-out doors as well as inside, Lazy-Susan-type cabinets that rotate for full access to round shelves, or cabinets with shelves that roll out on tracks so you can easily reach even those things you store at the back of the shelf. If your cabinets don't have these convenient features, you can improvise by mounting racks on the inside of the doors or installing those handy roll-out shelves yourself. Look for such kits in hardware or kitchen stores.

A good cabinet or closet system enables you to see exactly what's in your pantry, thus helping to inspire your culinary creativity and allowing you to grab what you need without knocking over vinegar bottles and stacks of spice jars. Store dried beans, pasta, different kinds of rice, flour, sugar, tea, and coffee in large glass or clear plastic jars with lids. This type of storage is practical and looks professional, too.

If you use something all the time, consider taking it out of the pantry and storing it closer to your stove or workstation, in a "satellite" pantry like a cabinet or shelf. You might want to do this with your cooking oils and sprays, your spice rack, or your baking supplies such as baking soda, baking powder, and vanilla.



Kitchen islands are extremely efficient in that they can have considerable storage space below. Moreover, they can double as a kitchen table. If you don't have an island (and you have the space), consider buying a butcher block table with shelving underneath.

Introducing major appliances: Friends, not foes

There they are, those formidable appliances that make your kitchen into a room custom-made for food preparation and storage. Your major appliances are capable of producing the most exquisite gourmet meals or the most horrible, burned disasters; of yielding fresh, glistening produce or slimy bags of who knows what?

Major appliances are your allies in good cooking. Until you make friends with your stove, your oven, your refrigerator, and small appliances (which we discuss in Chapter 2), you'll never really feel at home in the kitchen. To know your appliances is to love them, and knowing each appliance's relative strengths and weaknesses can help you make the most of what they can do for you.

Stovetop and oven

Whether you have an old gas stove that looks like it belonged to your grandma or a fancy space-age-looking glass cooktop, your stovetop may be the cooking appliance you use the most. Right under it, or sometimes over it, or possibly off to the side, is your oven, which you'll probably use almost as much for baking, roasting, and warming up leftovers. Your stove and oven are your best friends in the kitchen (see Parts II, III, IV, and V for recipes using your stove and oven), and if you're buying new ones, you have all kinds of new technology to choose from. Even if you won't be going appliance shopping any time soon, knowing exactly what kind of stovetop and oven you have and how to use them may help your cooking efforts.

Gas

Most serious cooks prefer gas stoves. You can turn a gas flame up and down quickly, which is important in sautéing and sauce making. You can adjust the flame in tiny increments, more so than you can with an electric stove with numbers on the dials. Commercial gas ranges are extremely powerful and can cut your cooking time by as much as one-fourth, but simple home ranges work just fine for most purposes. New cooks may feel intimidated by gas because of the flames, and gas stoves can produce higher heat than electric stoves, so those used to cooking on electric stoves will need to adjust so that they don't burn their food or destroy that expensive sauté pan. But with a little practice, you'll get the hang of cooking with gas. When you can confidently proclaim, "Oh, I like to cook only with gas," you know you've reached a whole new level of culinary prowess.



Newer gas ranges should not smell of gas from flaming pilot lights. Newer models no longer have standing pilots. They ignite electronically; therefore, gas doesn't flow through the system unless the range is turned on. If you do smell gas, you have a leak in your system. This situation is dangerous — call your gas company immediately. Do not use the stove or any other electrical appliances, even your lights, because doing so can spark an explosion.

Electric heat

Electric ranges became all the rage after World War II. They were considered clean, easy to use, and modern. The drawback to electric ranges is their slow response time. Reducing heat from high to low can take a minute; gas can do it in seconds. However, many professional chefs prefer electric ovens, especially for baking, because they're very accurate and consistent. Today's gas and electric ovens generally hold and maintain oven temperature within a variance of about 5 degrees.

Induction

Induction is a new form of kitchen heat. Some professional chefs are so impressed with it that they predict it will replace all other systems in ten years.

Whether that is true or not, induction cooking is impressive to watch. Basically, it works on a magnetic transfer principle — heat passes via magnetic force from the burner to the pan. If you place a paper towel between the burner and the pan, the towel does not get hot. A 2-quart pot of water comes to a boil in about a minute. However, an induction cooktop uses only selected metal pans to which a magnet adheres, such as stainless steel. Copper and glass cookware, for example, do not work. An induction cooktop is expensive, priced at over \$800 for four burners.

Convection ovens

Chefs have used convection ovens for years. If we were to recommend an addition to your kitchen, a convection oven might be the one. A small fan in the rear of the oven circulates air all around the food to cook it rapidly and evenly. Cooking times and temperature settings are reduced by about 25 percent, so most manufacturers suggest that you reduce the cooking temperature given in the recipe by 25 degrees when baking. Some oven manufacturers offer both regular and convection cooking at the flick of a switch. Do you need a convection oven? No. But if you bake often, you might learn to love one.



If a convection wall oven is over your budget, consider the smaller, less expensive convection toaster oven, especially if you're cooking for one or two. It can toast, bake a cake, broil a burger, and roast a small chicken. And cooking times are shorter than in conventional ovens. Small convection ovens can cost as little as a few hundred dollars, while larger, full-sized convection ovens can range from a couple thousand dollars to \$10,000 or more, depending on the model and brand.

How does a microwave cook?

Every microwave has an energy box called a *magnetron*, which produces microwaves (from electricity). The microwaves pass through materials like glass, paper, china, and plastic to convert to heat when they come in contact with food molecules. The microwaves cause the

water molecules in the food to rotate so rapidly that they vibrate, creating friction and heat.

A major misconception is that microwaves cook from the inside out. They do not. Microwaves penetrate primarily the surface and no farther than 2 inches into the food. The heat spreads by conduction to the rest of the food.

Microwave ovens

Microwave cooking is unlike any other kind of conventional cooking. You must follow a different set of cooking rules. Although over 90 percent of American kitchens have a microwave, most people use the microwave only as a reheating and defrosting device. If this is your intention, purchase a simple unit with only one or two power levels. If you're short on counter or wall space, consider a microwave-convection oven combination that allows you to cook by using either method.

Microwaves can't pass through metal, so you can't cook with traditional metal cookware. You can, however, use flameproof glass, some plastics, porcelain, paper, ceramic, and plastic cooking bags. Some microwaves permit you to use aluminum foil to cover dishes, as long as the foil doesn't touch the oven walls or the temperature probe. Check your operating manual to see whether your appliance allows using foil in this way. Cookware placed in the microwave should not get hot. If it does, it's probably not microwaveable.



A microwave is not a replacement for conventional cooking of grilled meats, baked breads, cakes and cookies, and other foods that need browning — unless it has a browning unit. Use your microwave for what it does best in combination with other appliances. For example, you can precook chicken in minutes in the microwave and finish it under the broiler or on an outdoor grill. Following are some other microwave tips:

- ✓ Recipes that require a lot of water, such as pasta, don't work as well in a microwave and probably cook in less time on your stovetop.
- ✓ Foods must be arranged properly to cook evenly. Face the thickest parts, like broccoli stalks, outward toward the oven walls. Arrange foods of the same size and shape, such as potatoes, in a circle or square with space between them and no item in the center.
- ✓ Covering dishes eliminates splattering, and it also cuts down on cooking time. Frequently stirring, turning, and rotating foods ensures an even distribution of heat.

- ✓ As with conventional cooking, cutting foods into smaller pieces shortens cooking time.
- ✓ Before cooking, pierce with a fork foods that have skins, like potatoes, hot dogs, and sausages. Doing so releases steam that can lead to sudden popping and splattering.
- ✓ A number of variables, including the type of microwave, can affect a recipe's cooking time, so check for doneness after the minimum cooking time. You can always cook food longer. Also, always observe the recipe's "standing" time, because microwaved food continues to cook after you remove it from the oven.
- ✓ Be sure to use the defrost power setting (30 to 40 percent of full power) when thawing food to ensure slow and even defrosting; otherwise, the outside of the food may start to cook before the inside is thoroughly thawed.



Read your microwave manual carefully before using it. One woman we know ruined her microwave oven because she used the cooking-time button as a kitchen timer, not realizing that you should never run an empty microwave, a warning found in just about every manual.

Most major appliance companies, including General Electric (800-626-2000), Amana (800-843-0304), and KitchenAid (800-422-1230), have toll-free information numbers with appliance experts on hand to answer questions about using and caring for your microwave.

Refrigerator

Refrigerators are the black holes of the kitchen — objects drift in and are never seen again, at least until the next thorough cleaning. At that time, your leftovers may resemble compost. And what's in this little ball of aluminum foil? *Do not open!*

Refrigerators come in many sizes and shapes. A family of four needs a minimum of 16 cubic feet and should probably buy one that's at least 18 cubic feet (unless you have a teenage boy, in which case you need a second refrigerator). If you use the freezer a great deal, having the freezer compartment on the top, rather than the bottom, is more convenient. Make sure that the doors open in the most convenient way for your kitchen. Also check the door compartments to see whether space is available to place a bottle upright. The door should not be cluttered with little compartments that just eat up space.



Try not to pack the refrigerator too densely. This way, the cold air has sufficient space to circulate around and cool the food. Store foods in the same spot so that you don't have to search for that little jar of mustard or jelly every time you open the door. Clear shelves and bins make it even easier to see where everything is.

The bottom drawers are usually the coldest and should be used for storing meat, poultry, and fish. Fresh vegetables are usually stored in the *crisper* drawer, which is often located just above the meat bin. Salad greens and leafy herbs can be washed, thoroughly dried, and wrapped in paper towels to extend their storage life. Other vegetables, like broccoli and cauliflower, should be washed just before serving. Excess water on any vegetable in storage can hasten its deterioration.

Liberate old food from the refrigerator every two weeks or so, and give the fridge a good soap-and-water bath every few months. An open box of baking soda at the back of a shelf soaks up odors. Remember to replace the baking soda every few months.

Freezer

Your refrigerator and freezer hold what your pantry and cabinets can't: the stuff that has to stay cold. Your freezer can be a great storage space for food you buy in bulk, like meat, frozen vegetables, and bread, as well as leftovers like soup, chili, casseroles, and baked goods. Because your freezer space is probably relatively small, you can't store too much in there, however. To get the most use of the space, stack things neatly and use bins to keep things organized.

If you're lucky enough to have a stand-alone freezer, all the better! You can take advantage of sales on meat, frozen vegetables, and fruits, and can also cook in bulk, freezing leftover soups, stews, sauces, and desserts. You'll always have food handy at the touch of the microwave's defrost button. You can organize your stand-alone freezer more like your refrigerator, organizing food in bins and on separate shelves.

Finally, make sure that your refrigerator/freezer is within easy reach of your workspace. You can store a stand-alone freezer, however, in another room off the kitchen or even in the basement.

Dishwasher

Because you probably have better things to do with your evening than wash the dishes from dinner for eight, you'll probably want a dishwasher. Your dishwasher may be built in, or it may be portable. You can even buy tabletop dishwashers for modest dishwashing needs. Newer dishwashers require less prerinsing of dishes, and new dishwasher detergent formulas leave dishes spot-free. If you cook for a family, a dishwasher can save you a lot of time, but remember that dishwashers also use a lot of water and electricity. But for those who would rather spend time cooking than washing dishes, the expense is well worth it.

Garbage disposal

Garbage disposals are handy for the home cook. These grinders, housed in the underbelly of your sink drain, grind up the food that goes down the drain. If all you eat are frozen dinners and take-out, you probably won't need a disposal very often, but if you're always peeling, chopping, and wiping counters of the residue of cooking a good meal, you'll appreciate the convenience of a garbage disposal.



To keep your garbage disposal smelling good, grind up a few orange or lemon peels every so often. To keep the drain clean, once a month pour ½ cup baking soda down the drain, followed by 1 cup white vinegar. When the baking soda stops foaming, rinse with hot water. Better yet, let your kids do this kitchen chore. They love the volcanic action of the vinegar and baking soda.

Getting Acquainted with Basic Cooking Techniques

Recipes are full of terminology and techniques that new cooks might not be familiar with. At the heart of most recipes are some basic techniques, which we expand upon throughout this book in various sections. As a warm-up, however, here are the basic cooking techniques and what they involve. Become familiar with these terms, practice the techniques, and you'll realize that many recipes aren't as complicated as you thought.

- ✓ **Boiling, poaching, and steaming:** These terms involve cooking with water. *Boiling* is heating water so that it bubbles vigorously. *Poaching* is cooking fish, eggs, or vegetables in gently simmering water — water that is just beginning to bubble but not yet boil. *Steaming* is cooking food over, but not in, boiling or simmering water. We describe these techniques and more water-based cooking methods in detail in Chapter 4.
- ✓ **Sautéing:** This term refers to cooking food in a skillet or sauté pan quickly over high or medium-high heat, usually in heated oil or butter. Chapter 5 tells you all about sautéing.
- ✓ **Braising and stewing:** To *braise* is to cook food in a small amount of liquid, such as water or broth, for a long period of time. This technique results in particularly succulent meat. *Stewing* is cooking food (usually meat and veggies) in liquid flavored with herbs, broth, and sometimes wine until it is absorbed, to create a delectable, too-thick-to-be-soup concoction. For more on braising and stewing, check out Chapter 6.

Why everyone should learn to cook

Here are seven good reasons why everyone should learn to cook:

- ✓ When you dine in restaurants, you can complain with authority that particular dishes are not made the way you make them at home.
- ✓ You get to use all kinds of amusing implements — and actually know what to do with them.
- ✓ You can control your diet rather than depend on the dubious victuals churned out by carryout places or frozen food purveyors.
- ✓ At home, seconds and thirds are permissible.
- ✓ Feeding friends and loved ones is inherently more intimate than going to a restaurant.
- ✓ Establishing a connection with the food chain allows you to distinguish quality food from what's second rate. Who knows, you may even be inspired to plant a vegetable garden next spring.
- ✓ You start hanging around the cookbook section in bookstores — fertile terrain for opposite-sex encounters.

- ✓ **Roasting:** *Roasting* involves cooking food, uncovered, in a pan in the oven for a long period of time. This technique is usually used to describe cooking large pieces of meat, such as a pot roast or a turkey, or vegetables. Chapter 7 has lots more details about roasting.
- ✓ **Grilling:** If you like to spend as much time as possible outdoors, *grilling*, or cooking on a grate over hot charcoal or other heat element, is for you. Grill varieties include charcoal, gas, and electric. Chapter 8 goes into more detail about grill choices and grilling techniques.

Planning Your Menu

It's one thing to cook a recipe. It's another thing to plan a meal or a whole week's worth of meals! Menu planning, however, can be a lot of fun and a great way to experiment with new recipes and techniques. Planning your menu and writing out a shopping list assures that you have everything you need for your meals before you start cooking. Some cooks like to write down all the elements of each meal for an entire week at a time and then study recipes and make out a shopping list. To some people, this approach may sound tedious. To others, the chance to read all those recipes sounds like fun! But you don't have to be quite so formal, as long as you make sure you have all the necessary ingredients and equipment to cook all the elements of a meal before you begin.

But how do you know what to make? Formal dinners typically have several courses, including appetizers, salad, soup, a main course, a dessert, and sometimes even courses such as a cheese course, a pasta course, and a casserole course. It all depends on how fancy you want to get.

For most families, however, a simple meal with a main course (a meat or vegetarian dish, featuring ingredients separately or in a casserole form), accompanied by soup or a salad and bread, rice, pasta, or some other grain, make a filling and complete meal — with or without dessert. Healthy choices include lean meats and lowfat dairy dishes based on whole grains and legumes (such as lentils and white or black beans), lots of fresh vegetables, and sweetness from fresh fruit. Lunch can be even simpler: a hearty salad (see Chapter 12) or a big bowl of soup (see Chapter 11). And what about breakfast? See Chapter 10 for some delicious dishes based on eggs.

Holidays and special events offer opportunities to plan fancier or more elaborate meals or meals with a theme. Special dinners also provide an excuse to serve fancy desserts you may not want to indulge in every day (see Chapter 15 for dessert ideas of all kinds).

Menu planning is limited only by your imagination! See Part IV of this book for some specific ideas on menu planning, depending on the event, your budget, and how much time you have to prepare. Part V gives you more ideas for menus when you want to host a party.

Kitchen Safety 101

Cooking is fun, but it also requires certain precautions. You may think that the biggest danger in the kitchen is serving a meal that has guests roaring hysterically with laughter on their way home (“Can you believe he called that fiasco *dinner*?”). As humiliating as that can be, home cooks should be aware of other perils as well, so they can take the proper precautions and cook with no worries

Do you remember Dan Akroyd’s classic skit on *Saturday Night Live*, in which he impersonates world-renowned chef Julia Child? In the middle of his cooking demonstration, he pretends to accidentally cut off his fingers: “Just a flesh wound,” he warbles and continues cooking. Then he severs his wrist, his hand falling to the ground. Blood spurts everywhere. Pretty funny, huh?



That wildly exaggerated scene carries a cautionary note about razor-sharp knives: Always pay attention to what you’re doing because one slip can cause great pain. (Keep in mind that dull knives can be dangerous, too, because they force you to apply more pressure, and your hand may slip while doing this.) For more on kitchen safety and preventing or dealing with kitchen disasters, check out Chapter 22. Some basic rules of safety include the following:

- ✔ Store knives in a wooden block or on a magnetic bar mounted out of reach of children, not in a kitchen drawer. For more information about knives and knife safety, see Chapter 2.
- ✔ Never cook in loose-hanging clothes that may catch fire, and keep long hair tied back for the same reason (not to mention keeping hair out of the food!).
- ✔ Never cook while wearing dangling jewelry that can get tangled around pot handles.
- ✔ Professional chefs have hands of asbestos from years of grabbing hot pots and pans. You do not. Keep potholders nearby and use them.
- ✔ Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove, where children may grab them and adults can bump into them.
- ✔ Don't let temperature-sensitive foods sit out in your kitchen, especially in warm weather. Raw meat, fish, and certain dairy products can spoil quickly, so refrigerate or freeze them right away.
- ✔ Wipe up spills immediately so that no one slips and falls.
- ✔ Don't try to cook if your mind is elsewhere, because your fingers may wind up elsewhere as well.
- ✔ Separate raw meat, especially poultry, from produce and other items in your refrigerator to avoid cross-contamination of harmful bacteria from one food to another. Never put cooked food or produce on a cutting board where you were just cutting raw meat.
- ✔ Wash your hands before handling food. Hands can be a virtual freight train of bacteria, depending, of course, on what you do during the day. Also wash thoroughly after handling meat or poultry.
- ✔ To avoid panic-stricken searches, always return utensils to the proper place. Always return a knife to its holder when you're finished with it.
- ✔ Clean up as you work. Obvious, no? Then why doesn't everyone do it? We know people who can make a tuna salad sandwich and leave the kitchen looking as if they had just served a lunch to the Dallas Cowboys. Put away dirty knives, wipe down counters, and return food to the refrigerator between steps in a recipe — doing so keeps you thinking clearly and discourages household pets from jumping onto countertops. Plus, cleaning up as you go frees up that spatula or whisk for the next step of the recipe.
- ✔ Every kitchen needs a fire extinguisher. It is inexpensive (about \$15), easy to use, and mounts on the wall. This device may not do much for your cherries jubilee, but it can avert a disaster.
- ✔ The old wives' tale "Oil and water do not mix" happens to be true. Throwing water on a grease fire makes it worse by spreading it around. If the fire is contained in a pot or pan, cover it with a lid. For a fire in your oven or one that has spread to the floor, a few handfuls of baking soda or salt should cut off its oxygen supply while you grab the fire extinguisher.

Now Get Crackin'!

If you're eager to jump in and start cooking, try your hand at this quick and easy recipe for scrambled eggs, which you can enjoy for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Eggs are a healthy and nutritious protein source, and cooking them is easy (see Chapter 10 for more egg recipes). This recipe for Scrambled Eggs is perfect for the beginner and loved by all. These eggs are sure to please and impress your family and friends.



If you want to make excellent scrambled eggs, don't overbeat the eggs before you cook them.

Scrambled Eggs

Some scrambled egg recipes call for cream, which adds a nice smoothness to the eggs; others call for water, which increases the volume by stimulating the whites to foam. You can use either ingredient, or just use milk, for the following recipe — try it different ways and see which you prefer.

Tools: Medium bowl, fork, 10-inch (preferably nonstick) skillet or omelet pan, metal spatula or wooden spoon

Preparation time: About 5 minutes

Cooking time: About 4 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

8 eggs

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup light cream, half-and-half, milk (whole or low-fat), or water

2 tablespoons chopped chives (optional)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt (optional)

Few dashes black pepper (optional)

2 tablespoons butter

- 1 Break the eggs into a bowl. With a fork or a wire whisk, beat the eggs until they're blended to incorporate the yolks and whites, but no more. Add the cream (or milk or water if you prefer), chives (if desired), salt (if desired), and pepper, and beat a few seconds to blend well.
- 2 Melt the butter in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. (Don't let it burn.) Pour in the egg mixture. As the mixture begins to set, use a heatproof rubber spatula or wooden spoon to pull the eggs gently across the bottom and sides of the pan, forming large, soft lumps. The eggs are cooked when the mixture is no longer runny.

Vary It! You can dress up this basic scrambled eggs recipe by adding different seasonings to the liquid egg mixture, such as a dash of Tabasco sauce, a sprinkling of dry mustard or grated Parmesan cheese, 2 tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley or basil, or a teaspoon or so of freshly grated lemon.

Per serving: Calories 228 (From Fat 167); Fat 19g (Saturated 8g); Cholesterol 450mg; Sodium 133mg; Carbohydrate 2g (Dietary Fiber 0g); Protein 13g.



