

CRUNCH TIME

Mixing Techniques



INGREDIENTS:

90g Egg whites (approx. 3 eggs)
1 Squeeze bottle Bright food colouring
2x Bowls, 400g each of cream,
pre-whipped
400g Butter, softened
400g Flour
500g Pre-made dough (pizza or bread,
or similar for kneading)

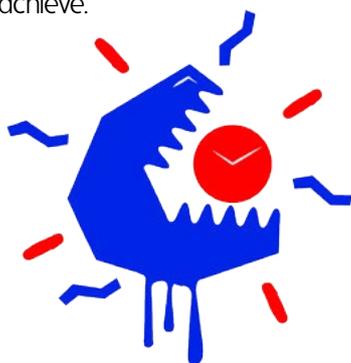
EQUIPMENT:

4x Glass mixing bowls
1 Whisk
1 Large mixing spoon
1 Electric mixer with beaters attached
1 Rubber spatula



METHOD:

1. Ingredients react to different treatments while mixing. This should be considered when deciding what mixing technique to use if a recipe doesn't specify. Think about the texture of the ingredient. Is it fragile or stable? How does it react to other ingredients? How are you trying to transform it? For example, gently stirring an egg won't get you any sort of respectable scrambled eggs: not only because you need force to break up the yolk into the whites-- but because you need a whipping motion to force air into the mix so the texture is light and fluffy.
2. Stirring is the simple circular or figure eight motion we're probably the most familiar with, and is good for evenly dispersing temperature or mixing easy to combine ingredients together-- such as milk in tea.
3. Folding is basically a slightly more advanced method of stirring that is far better at evenly distributing a range of ingredients together into a mix. More importantly, this technique is designed so that air doesn't get knocked out of the ingredients while mixing more sensitive things like whipped cream. With this technique, you always want to add the lighter ingredient into the heavier ingredient and a rubber spatula is ideal so that it can scrape the bowl as you mix, ensuring all ingredients are incorporated. To fold, use the spatula to cut vertically through the centre of your mix, scraping the bottom, and bring the heavy mixture at the bottom back up to the top. It's sort of a down-across-up-and-over motion-- a "fold". Turn the bowl as you mix to ensure everything is evenly distributed. Never stir while folding or you will lose the volume you've worked so carefully to preserve!
4. Whipping is the process of forcing air into your mix to build volume and change the texture. If you use a whisk to whip egg whites, for example, you can see this transformation quite quickly. By rapidly moving the whisk in a circular motion, you're momentarily separating the liquid and forming air pockets between the wires of the tool, forcing air into the spaces that momentarily exist. More and more air bubbles will form, increasing the volume. How long this volume will last depends on your ingredients. Some, like whipped cream, can keep it's form for a while-- but can also be over-whipped and collapse.
5. Beating is the process of combining ingredients vigorously around with any number of tools, but an electric mixer is very common for this. This is meant to combine ingredients quickly... but beware of dumping everything, wet and dry, into a mixing bowl all in one go as different ingredients need special care to combine properly. As a general rule, it's best to mix your wet and dry ingredients together separately before combining together to make sure they are evenly distributed.
6. Sometimes your bare hands are the best tool for mixing. When working with very thick doughs, your pressure sensitive and agile fingers might be the most adept. Rubbing is one example of this: the process of rubbing the fat called for in a recipe, often butter, into the flour so that the flour is finely coated to give a light texture when cooked. Once you have your dough mixed, many recipes call for an extra step: kneading.
7. Kneading dough is important to recipes where you need to develop the gluten to build elasticity; bread, for example. To knead by hand, dough is put on a floured surface, pressed and stretched with the heel of the hand, folded over and rotated repeatedly. This process continues until the dough is elastic and smooth. If something like bread dough is not kneaded enough, it will not be able to hold tiny pockets of gas and will collapse, leaving a heavy and dense loaf.
8. Remember: the best technique for mixing always depends on the ingredients you're working with and the final product you're trying to achieve.



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