

Parchment Paper: Kitchen Workhorse

We use parchment paper every day in the test kitchen, not only for baking but for many other tasks. Here's how to take parchment paper beyond the cookie sheet.

BY SHANNON BLAISDELL

Parchment sold for kitchen use is paper that has been treated with sulfuric acid and coated with silicone. Sulfuric acid turns the paper's surface sleek and smooth, but, more important, it makes the paper impervious to grease and moisture and enormously resistant to high temperatures. The silicone coating goes one step further to make the surface of the paper nonstick.

Strong and tough, parchment paper comes in a variety of forms: sheets, rolls, bleached, unbleached, and combinations thereof. Though we buy large commercial sheets in bulk for the test kitchen, our favorite

retail brand is Reynolds (see Kitchen Notes, page 30, for testing results).

Parchment Paper versus Wax Paper

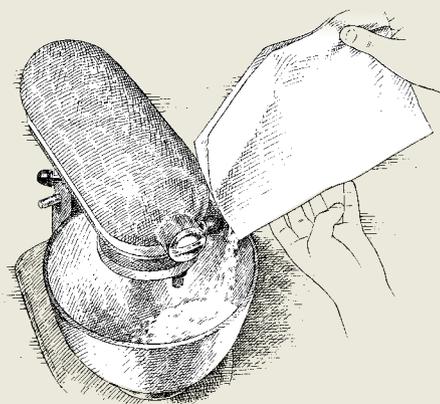
Parchment paper is not the same as wax paper. Invented by Thomas Edison, wax paper is tissue paper that's been coated with paraffin on both sides, making it resistant (but not impervious) to grease and moisture. Wax paper is easily compromised by liquid, it is prone to tearing, and it is not heatproof (the wax begins to melt at relatively low temperatures). Wax paper can be used

in the oven only if the paper is completely covered and protected from direct heat. You can line a cake pan with wax paper (the batter will cover and protect the paper), but don't line a cookie sheet with wax paper (the exposed portions will smoke and char).

Parchment is slightly more expensive than wax paper, but you get a lot of value for your money. Parchment can do everything that wax paper can do and more, and it can sometimes be reused. The same sheet can often be used several times to line cookie sheets, for instance.

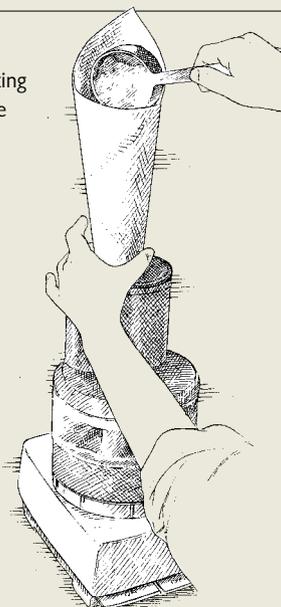
ADDING DRY INGREDIENTS

We often use parchment paper rolled into the shape of a funnel to add dry ingredients to mixing bowls or food processor workbowl when making cake batter or bread dough. This means one less dirty bowl to wash. Flour can also be sifted directly onto parchment.

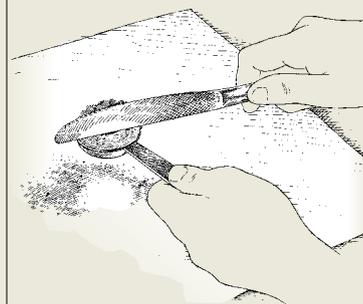


Left: Measure flour, spices, leaveners, and other dry ingredients onto a piece of parchment paper, then fold the parchment in half and pour the dry ingredients into the mixing bowl.

Right: Many food processor bread recipes call for adding flour in small increments. Instead of hovering over the food processor as you slowly add the flour, make a paper funnel using a doubled piece of parchment and place it in the feed tube. The flour will flow slowly and steadily into the bowl.



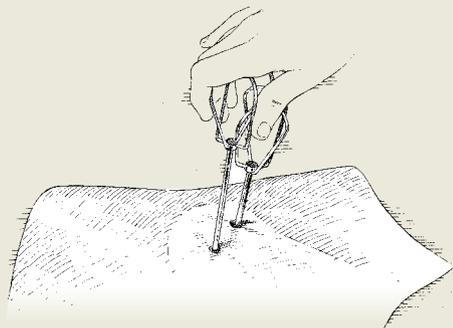
MEASURING AND REFILLING SPICES



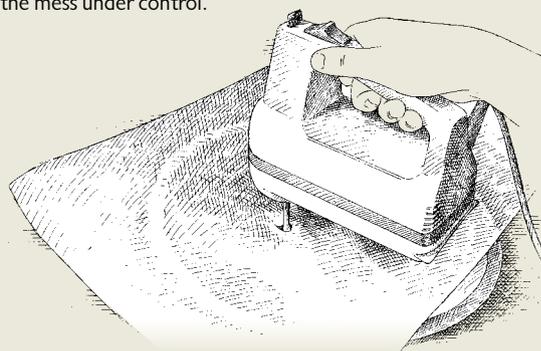
1. Measure ingredients such as spices, leaveners, and salt over a piece of parchment, not over the mixing bowl, to ensure accuracy.

SPLATTER-FREE MIXING

Hand-held mixers can get the job done but often cause an excessive amount of splashing, especially when you are beating a thin, liquid batter or whipping cream. Here's how we keep the mess under control.



1. On a piece of parchment cut larger than the size of your mixing bowl, make two holes, spaced as far apart as the beater openings on your mixer. Insert the beater stems through the holes and into the beater base.



2. While you're mixing, the parchment will cover the bowl, preventing the contents from splattering onto the counter or walls.

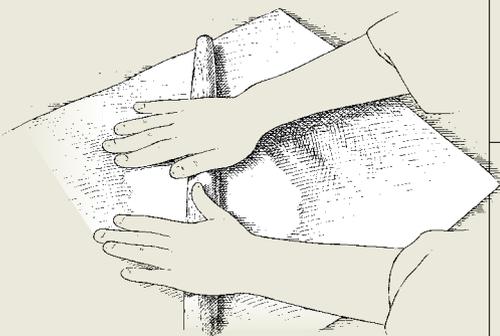


2. Spills can easily be poured back into their containers. Use this technique to fill salt shakers and pepper mills as well.

Illustration: John Burgoyne

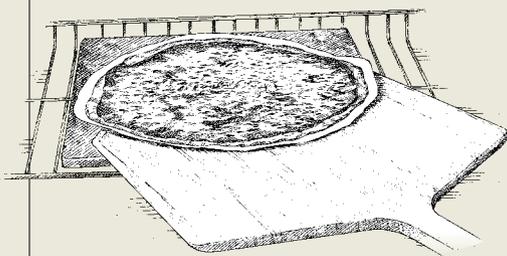
READY TO ROLL

Pie, pizza, and cookie dough are all easier to handle when parchment is in the picture.



Pie Dough

Constantly re-flouring a countertop to keep pie dough from sticking is a nuisance. And adding too much flour can make the dough dry and tough. In the test kitchen, we like to roll the dough between two sheets of parchment. (This also works with pizza dough.)



Pizza Dough

Getting a sticky pizza dough to slide off of a pizza peel can be tricky. If you roll out and sauce the pizza on parchment paper, you can slide the pizza, trimmed paper and all, onto the peel and into and out of the oven with ease. The parchment won't burn, and it easily falls away from the baked pie.

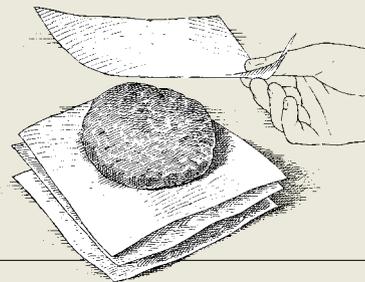


Icebox Cookies

After rolling the cookie dough into a log, lift the dough onto a piece of parchment and roll to seal. Refrigerate the parchment-wrapped dough until it is cold and firm. When you want to bake the cookies, unroll and slice the dough.

IN THE FREEZER

Wouldn't it be nice to freeze chops, steaks, or shaped burgers in one bag and then pull out just a few as needed? To avoid thawing unwanted meat because the block is frozen solid, we separate chops, steaks, and burgers with sheets of parchment, place the meat in freezer bags, and freeze as usual. The paper between the meat makes it much easier to pull individual pieces from the frozen package. This technique works with flour and corn tortillas as well as crêpes.

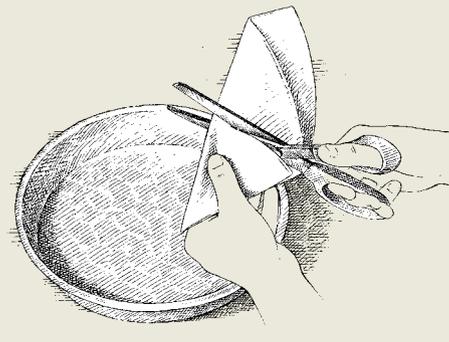


LINING CAKE PANS

Parchment paper ensures that cakes won't stick to pans. Here's how to get a perfect fit.

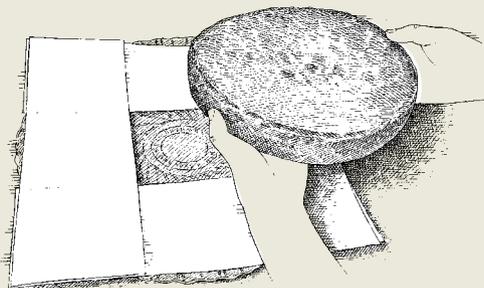


1. Trace the bottom of your cake pan roughly in the center of a sheet of parchment (use two sheets if using two pans).

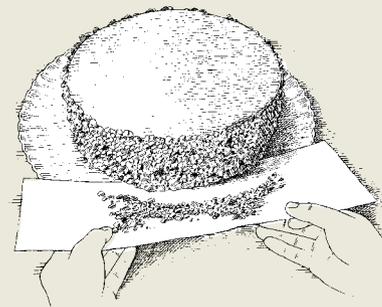


2. Fold the traced circle in half, in half again, and then in half again. Cut along the inside edge of the tracing. Unfold and fit the paper in the pan.

KEEPING THE CAKE PLATE CLEAN



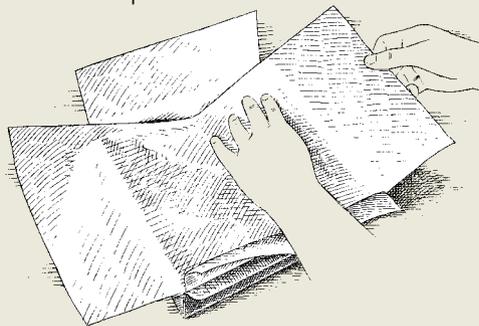
1. Using four rectangular pieces of parchment, form an empty square on top of the cake platter, leaving an overhang. Place the cake layers in the center of the empty parchment square, frost, and decorate.



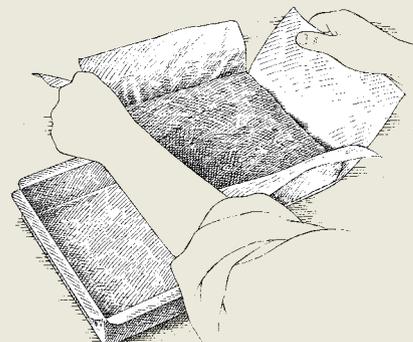
2. Once the frosting has had a chance to set slightly, carefully pull the sheets from beneath the cake, leaving behind a perfectly clean plate.

PARCHMENT SLING FOR BROWNIES AND BAR COOKIES

It can be difficult to extract brownies and bars from baking pans. Parchment solves this problem, prevents sticking, and makes cleanup a breeze.



1. Place two parchment sheets perpendicular to each other in the pan. Scrape the batter into the pan, pushing it into the corners.



2. After the brownies or bars have been baked and cooled, use the parchment to transfer them to a cutting board, and then slice into individual portions.