

Managing Editor Karl Frederick | (262) 656-6377 | kfrederick@kenoshanews.com

# Common cooking mistakes

## ▶ and how to fix them

BY MARI SCHUH QUAM | KENOSHA NEWS CORRESPONDENT

Oops, you did it again. The brownies are burnt and the veggies are mushy. Luckily, some small changes can make a big difference in the kitchen. Here's how to turn your disappointment into delight.



### Overworking dough

People often mix dough and batter too much, says Erica Buskirk, executive chef at Twisted Cuisine in Kenosha. In this case, more is not better. Overworked dough becomes dense and won't rise very well. Simply mix all the ingredients until they are barely mixed together. "Little clumps of flour are OK because they will dissolve later," she said.

### Overcooking baked goods

You thought you were doing the right thing by following the package's instructions to the tee. But your burnt brownies prove otherwise. Don't worry, it's not you, it's your oven. Oven temps can vary greatly. Next time, set your timer five to 10 minutes shorter than the suggested cooking time, suggests Steve Villalobos, culinary arts instructor at Gateway Technical College in Racine.

Then test for doneness every three to five minutes. To test, stick a toothpick in the item's center. If it comes out clean, your item is done. For bread, look at the bottom of the loaf. "If it's golden brown, the bread is ready," Villalobos said.

### Soggy muffins

Muffins are a yummy treat, but not if they're a soggy mess. If you let them sit in the tin, moisture builds up, explains Villalobos. Stay on task and remove them as soon as possible after baking. Place them on a cooling rack. And always use paper liners to make removal a snap.



### Overcooking vegetables

Mushy, overcooked veggies are a common blunder. What to do? All is not lost, says Buskirk. Purée overcooked cauliflower for a tasty mashed cauliflower dish, similar to mashed potatoes. Cut up overcooked asparagus and make cream of asparagus soup. To earn a gold star next time, constantly check your vegetables from the halfway point onward, Buskirk advises.

### Brown apples and avocados



Brown apple slices and avocado chunks never look appealing, no matter how healthy they are. Save the day with a splash of lemon or lime juice. The acid will keep the food from turning color. "You don't have to drown the food," says Villalobos. "Simply coating the food is enough."

### Cooking on a warm, bare grill

Wonder why your meat always sticks to the grill? It needs oil and high temps. Apply cooking oil to a paper towel. Then rub the paper towel on the grill using tongs. Heat the grill thoroughly before you start cooking. "Once you place the food on the grill, do not mess with it," Villalobos says. "The food will release and come off easily when it's ready to be turned."

### Buying lean ground beef

We all want to cut fat in our diet, but Buskirk says opting for lean ground beef with just 10 percent fat is a mistake. Go for ground beef with 15 or 20 percent fat instead. The fat makes the beef more tender and flavorful. "You're always going to strain away the fat anyway," she said.



### Not removing silver skin

Don't forget to remove the silver skin from meat before you cook it, says Villalobos. Silver skin is extremely tough and chewy. It's connective tissue, not fat, so it doesn't break down and melt like fat does when it's cooked. Use a boning knife or the thinnest blade knife you have. "Get under the silver skin and try to remove it in one piece," he said. Angle the knife's blade slightly upward so you don't remove any meat.

### Overcrowding the pan



PHOTO BY MARI SCHUH QUAM

Erica Buskirk advises cooking chicken breasts in batches or using two pans if needed so they don't get too crowded.

When you're ready to make stock, simply add meat, scraps and water. Bring to a boil and then simmer. "The longer you let it simmer, the better flavored stock you will get," Villalobos said. Wait to add salt and pepper until you are using the stock. You can also save and freeze bacon fat. It comes in handy when deep frying or when a dish needs added flavor, he said.

### Lumpy gravy

If you find yourself with a batch of lumpy gravy, don't try to pick out the lumps with a spoon. It's so tedious. Instead, simply pour the gravy through a sieve or a strainer. Presto! Smooth gravy is yours to enjoy.



### Wasting meat, vegetable scraps

Don't toss your meat and veggie scraps into the garbage. Store them in the freezer instead. They will make flavorful homemade stock. Use freezer bags to prevent freezer burn. Store chicken, beef, and pork scraps separately.

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PHOTO BY MARI SCHUH QUAM

Erica Buskirk uses a serrated knife to cut bread.

### Using the wrong knife

Maybe you have your favorite knife. And maybe you use it for everything. This, Buskirk says, is a bad habit. Don't use a small paring knife for all that chopping and dicing. Why suffer when you can use a long, thick chef's knife instead? It covers more area and gets the job done faster.

Also be sure to use a serrated bread knife when slicing loaves of bread. Serrated knives properly cut through soft bread and don't smash it down like other knives. "It's something simple, but people don't think about it," she said.

### Using a tiny cutting board

Bigger is better when it comes to cutting boards. Use an ample-sized cutting board for all your slicing and dicing. Sure, tiny ones are cute, but they're too small for most tasks. Use a normal-sized cutting board and watch your prep time shrink.

## Coffee secret ingredient in roasted pork

 BY J.M. HIRSCH  
AP FOOD EDITOR

Coffee has become my new favorite ingredient when roasting meat.

It's an effortless way to add gobs of flavor to whatever I am making. All I do is add whole coffee beans to whatever spice blend I am using as a wet or dry rub, then grind it to a powder and apply to the meat. The coffee provides deep, rich flavors with just a hint of acid. It's a combination that works wonders for roasted meat.

I've tried the spice-coffee combination called for below on both beef and pork tenderloins; both were fantastic. You also could use it on chicken breasts or thighs for a "blackened" chicken.

The seasonings can be applied to the meat right before roasting. But if you have a little extra time, the flavor is even better if you rub the spices on the meat, then refrigerate it for several hours before roasting. And if you'd rather use these flavors in a wet rub, don't hesitate to add a little olive or canola oil to the blend.

If you're looking for a simple and speedy dinner, make the roasted pork tenderloin in this recipe and serve it as is with a side salad or some roasted vegetables. Or for something party-worthy, slice it, slap it on rounds of baguette, then top with a dollop of cherry jam.



AP PHOTO

### CHERRY-TOPPED COFFEE-ROASTED PORK TENDERLOIN

An electric spice grinder (or coffee grinder) is the easiest way to make the spice rub for this recipe. If you don't have one, substitute an equal amount of ground coffee for the beans, then use a mortar and pestle or food processor to grind everything together. Makes 36 appetizers.

1 tablespoon coffee beans  
1 teaspoon garlic powder  
1 teaspoon fennel seeds  
1 teaspoon smoked paprika  
1 teaspoon whole peppercorns

1 teaspoon kosher salt  
3 pounds pork tenderloins  
1 baguette, thinly sliced into 36 rounds  
Olive oil  
10-ounce jar cherry jam

Heat the oven to 400 F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and coat with cooking spray.

In a spice grinder, combine the coffee beans, garlic powder, fennel seeds, paprika, peppercorns and salt. Grind until the beans and seeds are finely ground. Rub the spice-coffee blend evenly and liberally over the pork tenderloins. Set the tenderloins on the prepared baking sheet, then roast for 20 minutes, or until they reach 145 F at the center. Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, brush the baguette slices with olive oil, then arrange on a baking sheet and toast for 2 minutes, or until just barely browned.

When the pork is ready, cut it into thin slices. To serve, place one slice of pork on each piece of baguette, then top with a small dollop of cherry jam.

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