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AG dont Va Slather it on toast or whip it into cakes. In the test kitchen, butter is what makes or Juicier chicken breasts, more tender omelets, and creamier mashed potatoes. ay xetrr onessex

BUYING AND STORING BASICS

Shopping

SALTED OR UNSALTED? In the test kitchen, we use unsalted butter almost exclusively and add our own salt to recipes. Why? First, the amount of salt in salted butter varies from brand to brand—on average ¥ teaspoon a stick—which makes offering a universal conversion impossible. Second, salted butter almost always con-

tains more water, which can interfere with gluten development—particularly impor- AE tant in baking. (Biscuits made with salted butter were noticeably mushy.) Third, salt Land O’Lakes eee es masks butter’s naturally sweet, delicate flavors; in butter-specific recipes like beurre blanc and buttercream frosting, we found that extra salt to be overwhelming.

Whipped Butter:

A Stand-In for Stick? Whipped butter, made by beating air into butter, makes a creamy spread but isn’t always a good alternative to stick butter for cooking. While testers couldn’t tell the difference in baked

goods, they found the aerated butter “foamy” and “plastic-like” in uncooked applications such

as frosting. If you want to use whipped butter, base your substitution on weight, not volume. (Adding air increases the volume, not the weight.) A standard tub of whipped butter weighs

8 ounces, equal to two sticks of butter.

PLAIN OR PREMIUM? While you hear a lot about the higher fat content in premium butters, they actually contain only about a gram more per tablespoon than regular butter, and even our tasters had trouble telling the difference. The real distinction is culturing—the process of fermenting the cream before churning it that builds

: FAVORITE tangy, complex flavors. That said, these nuances are subtle in most cooked applications, PREMIUM BUTTER so we save the expensive cultured stuff for spreading on toast. Lurpak Unsalted Butter

Storing

Placed in the back of the fridge where it’s coldest (not in the small door compartment), butter will keep for 22 weeks. In tests we’ve found that any longer and it can turn rancid as its fatty acids oxidize. For longer storage (up to four months), move it to the freezer. Also, since butter quickly picks up odors and flavors, we like q to slip the sticks into a zipper-lock bag.

Tooling Around

Butter Keeper Chilling butter keeps it from spoiling, but also makes it too stiff to spread on toast. That’s where a butter keeper comes in: Shaped like a mini crock, the top of this two-part vessel is filled with softened butter while the base holds water (which is changed every few days). When the lid is put in place, the water forms a seal around the butter, protecting it from light and air. We found that butter kept this way stayed ———

B fresh for a month. Ss

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GAUGING BUTTER TEMPERATURE

Butter temperature can dramatically affect the texture of baked goods. For the most accurate results, we check the temperature with an Instant-read thermometer. The following tactile clues will also provide a good gauge.

lest Kitchen

Favorite: Norpro :

Butter Keeper **CHILLED** SOFTENED | MELTED AND COOLED (\$8.95) (about 35 degrees) (65 to 67 degrees) | (85 to 90 degrees)

Method: Let refrigerated butter | »Method: Melt butter in a small sit at room temperature for about saucepan or microwave-safe bowl; 30 minutes. ’ cool about 5 minutes. How to Test It: The stick-will__ | >How to Test It: The butter easily bend without breaking and | should be fluid and slightly warm. give slightly when pressed. => Why It Matters: Butter is > Why It Matters: Softened roughly 16 percent water, butter is flexible enough

to be when it's melted, the whipped but firm enough to retain | water breaks from the the incorporated air—vital to mak- | emulsion and helps Ing cakes with a tender crumb. create gluten for wa chewier

cookies.

Method: Cut butter into small pieces; freeze until very firm, 10 to 15 minutes.

How to Test It: Press with

a finger—it should be cold and unyielding.

Why It Matters: Cold butter melts during baking, leaving behind small pockets of air that create flaky layers in recipes like ple dough and

Butter Measuring Knife

Improperly wrapped sticks of butter—or unmarked blocks—make measuring a guess- ing game. We like this reversible ruler-like paddle knife that accurately measures and neatly cuts both stick butter and the fat- ter, block-style kind (though it's too narrow for pound-block butter). > Test Kitchen Favorite: KitchenArt Pro Measuring Butter Knife (\$10.96)

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