

Baking On A Budget

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Baking does not have to be expensive. Many of the tools you need can be purchased for \$10 or less. Below you will find a list of the most useful baking tools along with “Good”, “Better”, and “Best” recommendations to fit any budget. Sections marked with an asterisk (*) are optional, but useful.

All prices were accurate at the time of writing this guide, but prices do fluctuate

Digital Scale

This is *the* most valuable tool you can pick up. It will instantly elevate your baking to a whole new level.

Good - [Amazon Basics Digital Scale \(\\$6.95\)](#)

It's cheap, it works, and the display sticks out from the bottom a little bit so it's easier to read with a bowl on top.

Better - [Kitchenaid Digital Scale \(\\$25.49\)](#)

Nicer quality than the amazon scale. Having a physical dial to adjust the metric of measurement is nice. If you are going to spring for this model you may consider just going all the way and picking up the OXO

Best - [OXO Digital Scale \(\\$55.99\)](#)

A solid, easy to read scale with physical buttons that make it easy to tell when you've actually pressed the tare button or not (that's a real problem on other scales). The divot in the center helps keep things tidy and the pull out display makes seeing what you're measuring a breeze.

Bonus - [Tiny scales \(~\\$10\)](#)

These are great for measuring small amounts of ingredients precisely. Such as yeast and salt in recipes.

Straight Sided Vessel

You are going to want some form of a straight sided vessel for storing and feeding your starter. This can be as simple as a mason jar, or as complicated as a jar designed to maintain a starter. The reason you want it to be a *straight* sided vessel is to make life easier when scraping down the sides. Trying to reach underneath the ledge of a curved vessel is a pain and typically comes with the added headache that you can't comfortably fit your hand inside. Glass is also the ideal material since it doesn't react with food or leach chemicals.

Good - [16oz Wide Mouth Mason Jars](#) (\$22.99)

It's cheaper to buy these from your local grocery or restaurant supply store. A pack of 12-16 of these jars can replace a variety of tools in your kitchen including drinking glasses, tupperware, salad dressing shakers, overnight oats vessels... you get the idea. They're also great for maintaining your starter and it's what I use. The *only* downside is that 16oz is just slightly small when making a starter from scratch and you will get some spillover on days 3-5, but it's minor and never happens again. So it's not really worth getting a whole new vessel for.

Better - [Weck Storage Jars](#) (\$29.92)

Weck makes beautiful storage jars and they come in more sizes than the standard mason jars. They're a bit pricier per jar, and you'll need to remove the gasket so the starter can breath, but they're also the most beautiful choice of the bunch.

Best - [A Dedicated Starter Jar](#) (\$26.74)

This jar has a lot of nice little features built in. The weight of the vessel is printed on the side, has a temperature gauge, comes with a breathable lid and spatula, and even has a little thing to mark when you last fed your starter. It's a nice little option that makes life easy when you're just getting started.

Instant Read Probe Thermometer*

This tool is optional, but also one of the most useful tools you could have in the kitchen. Instead of trying to guess when something is done, you can get the exact right temperature and *know*. You can even check the internal temperature of breads and cakes to make sure they are done, in case you aren't a fan of the not-so-accurate "poke it with a stick" test.

Good - [Anything in the \\$10 range](#)

Even an *okay* instant read thermometer can get the job done. Their biggest drawback is usually how fast they can take the temperature, which is important when your hand is hovering over a hot grill or inside of a toasty oven.

Better - [Lavatools Javelin Pro](#) (\$54.99)

This is the second best instant read thermometer out there. It's a solid choice, reads fast, and has far more features than the \$10 option.

Best - [ThermoWorks Thermapen](#) (\$83)

ThermoWorks makes the best thermometers in the world. They're the fastest, the most accurate, and you'll start noticing them in cooking videos and professional kitchens all over the world. They're just the best. They are *not* the same as *ThermoPro*, which is just trying to profit off of the ThermoWorks name, because ThermoWorks can only be purchased from their dedicated website. If you see it anywhere else, it's a fake. They just released a new version of the Thermapen that can take an accurate reading in 1-second or less (which is insane). I haven't tried it, but I do have a lot of trust in this brand and it's only a few dollars more at \$105.

Offset Spatula, 4-4.5”*

You almost can't go wrong with offset spatulas. The ultra-wide icing ones are a bit unruly when it comes to scraping down jars, but are indeed great for icing. A dishwasher safe handle is also useful. When it comes to sourdough I prefer my offset spatula to have a blade between 4-4.5 in long and only 0.75 in wide. This tool is optional, but you'll use it all the time.

Good - [Ateco Ultra Offset Spatula](#) (\$5.99)

Ateco is well known for making baking and cake supplies. It's a reliable brand. You can also go to a local "restaurant supply store" (just google it) and pick up an offset spatula there. I got mine from a little shop in San Francisco for \$3 years ago and I'll likely never need to replace it.

Better - [Szxc 3-Piece Small Baking Spatulas](#) (\$9.99)

3 little spatulas in various shapes, which gives you a little more versatility.

Best - [Ateco Ultra Offset Spatula 3-Piece Set](#) (\$22.99)

This is the same as the "Good" recommendation, but with 2 more sizes which are helpful for things like cake decorating. If you don't plan on ever decorating cakes, just get the single offset spatula.

Mixing Bowls

Stainless steel and glass are the two best materials for this since they are easy to clean and don't hold onto smells. I'm partial to stainless steel over glass, because I can drop them without worrying about shards of glass everywhere, and they tend to nest better and take up less space in the drawer than glass. Glass does have the added benefit of being a good insulator, is microwave safe, and looks a bit nicer. For the most part, you can't go wrong. Just pick something that has a somewhat wide, flat, base so it's not likely to tip over on you when mixing or whisking.

There isn't much of a spectrum here, especially for the stainless steel. So I gave you two options. Once stainless steel, and the other glass. Pick whichever you prefer.

[Set of 6 nested bowls, stainless steel](#) (\$22.97)

[Set of 10 nested bowls, glass](#) (\$27.22)

Bowl Scraper*

This is one of those silly little purchases you put off making for a long time, but as soon as you get it you realize you should have gotten it long ago. Especially when you realize a set of 4 is only \$8.99

Again, no spectrum here. They're all cheap and they all work. Just make sure it's got some flexibility

[Bowl/Dough Scraper 4 piece set \(\\$8.99\)](#)

I use the orange ones in this set quite a bit. The white ones can act as a bench scraper, but I prefer metal tools for that. This is the exact set I use

Bench Scraper/Pastry Knife

Probably one of my most used tools in the kitchen. A bench scraper can be used to scoop up the food you've just chopped, cut your dough, scrape up caked on messes from your counters, and much more. I prefer metal over plastic, because they can easily scrape up any dried up dough from my counters. This is *technically* optional, but it will make your life so much easier that you should probably just pick one up.

Good - [any](#) (~\$7)

In this case, just about anything is better than nothing. Avoid the ones with a wooden handle, because that means you won't be able to soak it or throw it in the dishwasher when you're done cooking.

Better - [OXO Stainless Steel Scraper \(\\$11.99\)](#)

OXO makes great products known for their comfortable and grippy hand holds. This is an especially sturdy bench scraper. I've often used mine to chop nearly frozen blocks of butter.

Best - [Norpro Stainless Steel Scraper \(\\$8.62\)](#)

While it's not as sturdy as the OXO scraper, the offset nature of the handle on this scraper makes it easier to scoop veggies off the cutting board, tucks away in the drawer a little better, and will even nicely tuck under most cutting boards while you are cooking, which saves you even more counter space.

Plastic Wrap/Bowl Cover

There *is* a best in this category. Anything you can buy from the grocery store will do the job, so I'll skip the "Good" category on this one.

Better - [Kirkland Signature Stretch-Tite Plastic Wrap](#) - (\$28)

This is the brand you will most often find in professional kitchens. Even their small rolls are a generous 750sqft and they *cling* better than any other brand out there.

Best - [Disposable Shower Caps](#) (\$3.99)

You won't actually be disposing these and a set of 32 will last you years and years. The shower caps can replace the need for plastic wrap in most recipes with the elastic band keeping a decent seal on your bowl. It's not *perfect* and some recipes do need a *tight*

seal on the bowl. So you'll want to have regular plastic wrap on hand as well. But having the shower caps means less waste (you can keep reusing them bake after bake) and you don't have to fight with the roll to grab a piece of plastic wrap when your hands are covered in dough.

Kitchen Towel(s)

Such a versatile tool in the kitchen. A good kitchen towel is a potholder, a trivet, a fine mesh sieve, a mess cleaner, and even a fire extinguisher (if you know what you're doing!). I stopped buying pot holders years ago and just double up my kitchen towels to make a thick oven mitt as I need it. I despise microfiber kitchen towels, because I've never once encountered one that could handle even the smallest of spills.

Good - [Utopia Towels Kitchen Towels](#) (\$17.99)

These are perfectly fine towels. Decently absorbent and thick enough to be used as pot holders when doubled over.

Better - [Flour Sack Tea Towels](#) (\$16.99)

Remarkably versatile and white is a good look in any kitchen. Flour sack towels are on the thin side, so you'll want to really double them over a few times if you're going to use them as pot holders. These are also great for squeezing liquid out of ingredients like shredded zucchini, roasted riced cauliflower, and when making nut milks.

Best - [Surgical Huck Towels](#) (\$15.19)

Yep, the same thing surgeons use in the OR is also great in the kitchen. These things are ridiculously absorbent, have great heat insulation, and they're size is perfect for every kitchen task. They aren't as great for squeezing the liquid out of ingredients as the flour sack towels, and some brands will send you something that *looks* like a surgical huck towel, but has trouble absorbing anything (send those back) so be careful where you buy them from.

Something To Score The Dough

You just need something sharp to score (cut a line in the top of) the dough. Any sharp kitchen knife will work in a pinch. ("lame" is pronounced with a long 'a', like "lama")

Good - [Victorinox Paring Knife](#) (\$11.97)

This little guy is *sharp*! Be careful. It's a decent all around paring knife in the kitchen. You could also just use any clean razor blade. Just be careful!

Better - [Baker Of Seville Bread Lame](#) (\$15.55)

Many websites taut this as the best bread lame out there for its versatility. It's the only bread lame that can do both a straight and a curved blade, but I disagree that makes it the best. It's good. I have one and do use it. But it has some downsides. Mainly, the giant knurled knob that holds the blade in place is too close to the edge of the blade to

allow me to make cuts in the dough as deep as I would like. It'd definitely sturdy, looks nice, and feels safer than any other tool out there.

Best - [UFO Style Lame](#) (\$12.99)

This tool has decent safety features (the blade *can* be tucked away inside, but it's an awkward process and it *feels* like you are going to cut yourself), but is the best of the bunch when it comes to being able to make smooth, deep, cuts in your dough

It's entirely possible that a sharp, clean, construction knife or box cutter would actually be the best tool for this, but I haven't tried it and I haven't seen anyone else try it either... Food for thought.

Parchment paper

Quick rule of thumb: Any time you are baking below 425F, use parchment paper. Above 425F, use aluminum foil. We buck this rule when baking bread in our 475F ovens, but that's because it's inside a closed vessel which is producing steam (so it's unlikely to ignite in the oven)

Good/Better - Any unbleached parchment paper will do the job

Best - [12x16" Pre-Cut Parchment Sheets](#) (\$15.29)

Another one of those purchases that is easy to put off for too long and then you kick yourself for not doing it sooner. The pre-cut sheets in a standard pan size just make life easier. Plus, since it wasn't part of a roll it doesn't try to roll up on you when you are using it. It just stays *flat!* If you're on the edge of converting to pre-cut, just do it. You'll thank me later.

Something To Bake In

You're going to need something to bake it, so here are the 3 best options. Moving to the next level can get pricey here, so I encourage you to either stick with what you already have to start with the cheapest option and only upgrade when you know you'll use it frequently.

Good - [USA Pan Bakeware Aluminized Steel Loaf Pan](#) (\$17.99)

While there are definitely cheaper options out there, this brand makes very nice pans on par with Nordicware, but with a better shape and non-stick built right in.

*Better #1 - [Amazon Basics 6qt Dutch Oven](#) (\$49.99)

Dutch ovens are a remarkable versatile baking dish in the kitchen, especially when they are enameled. You can brown meat, saute veggies, make stews, and even bake bread in them. They're an all around great kitchen tool. The weight of the lid helps capture steam while you are baking and gives your sourdough a better rise than if it was just in a bread pan.

*Better #2 - [Lodge Combo Cooker Cast Iron](#) (\$49.90)

A combo cooking is a lot like a dutch oven, but the lid is also a pan. They are not as frequently enameled, so you wouldn't want to make a red sauce in it (the acidity of the tomatoes would react with the iron and create an unpleasant taste), but it is significantly easier to safely place a loaf of bread into the smaller pan and cover it with the bigger side of the combo cooker to capture steam than it is to lower a loaf into a dutch oven.

***Best - [Deli & Co Cast Iron Bread Pan](#) (\$147) (unavailable at the time of writing this)**

If you are baking sourdough on a regular basis, want the crustiest bread, and have a little extra space in your kitchen, then this is what you want to buy. This brand out of Brazil is the best in the business, and they *really* care about quality manufacturing. Their pans sell out on Amazon fast, but they're also half the cost of similar style pans and look like they exceed in quality as well.

Cooling rack*

If you like to bake you'll want to get a nice set of cooling racks. The cheap ones sold in grocery stores will often flake off metal after just a few uses. No bueno. The most common size pans in your home are actually "half sheet" pans, so get cooling racks of the same size. I also prefer my cooling racks to have a grid pattern rather than just parallel wires in a single direction. The grid is sturdier and less likely to drop food through the cracks.

Good - [Tebery 4 Pack Cooling Racks Baking Rack - 16" x 10"](#) (\$15.99)

A set of 4 is likely more than you'll ever need, but these *are* highly rated. The manufacturer says their "oven safe", but the black coating makes me think otherwise.

Better - [Stainless Steel Stackable Cooling Rack, set of 3](#) (\$21.99)

Having stackable cooling racks are especially helpful in small kitchens. These ones are also oven safe.

Best - [Half-Sheet Stainless Steel Cooling Rack](#) (\$17.95)

The only downside to these cooling racks are their price. \$17.95 a piece is a little pricey, but they're solid, work great in the oven, wash up in the dishwasher without any issues, and they don't have the sharp edges to the wires you sometimes encounter on cheaper cooling racks. They *do not* stack though, so if you need to save space in your kitchen go with the "Better" option above.