

Salt—the essential ingredient throughout the ages

Where would we be without the world's most common condiment? Salt.

When I was young and cooking, you added salt to a recipe and that was it. There was no further conversation. It was taken for granted that we were talking about free-running table salt. The salt was iodized (mixed with sodium iodine—an element found lacking in some diets—so it was therefore added to the salt). It was used everywhere, all the time.

But now, we have become salt connoisseurs. Perhaps it is a sign of our wealth that we can afford to be more selective in our food choices or perhaps the ever-more global economy has allowed us to experience foods we never could before or perhaps the growing fashion of being a food snob has taught us to ask before we pour. In any case, no longer do you just sprinkle from a simple chrome-topped salt shaker. The choices are endless.

In its pure state, salt consists of two basic types: sea salt which is extracted from sea water by evaporation and rock salt, which is found in a crystalline state in the ground.

The rock salt can be found as an underground deposit from an ancient ocean or a surface deposit from a dried lake. Rock salt can be edible if it has been processed to this point, however it is often used in its crude form for such uses as in the making of ice cream.

Sea salt is the one to which we specially prize. Much sea salt is evaporated artificially, however, there are some places, particularly along the Mediterranean coast, where traditional methods of evaporating the sea water are still used. The sea water is drawn into large shallow 'basins' and left to the heat of the sun. As the sun evaporates the water, salt deposits are left behind.

The salt on the bottom of the basins will be affected mostly in colouring by the nature of the material of the basin.

However, the salt crystals formed higher up will be pure white. It is these which constitute in France the more expensive fleur de sel. If you have never tried fleur de sel—then treat yourself sometime!

Bay salt (a term seldom used anymore) is the same as sea salt.

Black salt is brownish-black in lump form, but pinkish-brown when powdered. It is liked for its 'smoky aroma'.

Gross sel is a French term for sea salt.

Kosher salt comes in large irregular crystals and has no additives. It is called kosher salt because it meets Jewish requirements.

Pickling salt is designed for pickling because it dissolves quickly.

And now if you make a stop at a gourmet food shop you will find lemon salt, spiced salt, lovage salt, hickory salt and more. A wonderful gift is a tin of several kinds of salt.

Since ancient times, salt has been revered. Hebrews used salt in important ceremonies. Romans used salt not only to preserve foods, but as part of soldiers' wages. The salt routes were used in the Middle Ages for a solid flow of trade, both in France and

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Scandinavia.

Since salt had the power to preserve food for the long term, it became essential to life. Because it was easy to supervise the production of salt, some governments taxed it.

Even now, salt remains an essential ingredient in the food industry for canned foods, salted meat, fish and cheese production. It is used to preserve foods, to enhance the flavour of food, to bring out the taste and to stimulate the appetite.

Two very important rules to remember when dealing with salt in the kitchen: first, when making a soup, stew or sauce, add the salt at the end of the cooking process. If you add the salt at the beginning, then proceed to reduce the amount of liquid in your dish, you may find the final product too salty.

Second, be wary of old recipe books. You may find that older cookbooks put substantially more salt in the recipes than would be acceptable by today's guidelines. Remember you can always add, but you can never take out.

Have fun and keep cooking!

Everything Cookies

Ingredients

- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup shredded unsweetened coconut
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 1 cup rolled oats (not the instant kind)
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda



Method

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. With an electric mixer, beat the butter and sugars until pale and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Add the peanut butter, mix well.
3. In a separate bowl, mix remaining ingredients well.
4. Add the dry ingredients to the wet and mix by hand until combined, but do not beat or over mix.
5. Drop by teaspoons on a parchment lined cookie sheet and bake for 10 minutes in centre of oven. Makes eight dozen.

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