**How to Soften Butter, Fast!**

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It happens all the time. I’m in the mood to bake, I’ve got a great recipe, all of my ingredients are on the counter, and then I read the dreaded words: butter, softened. My butter is rock hard from the fridge. Oh, bother.

Oh well, I’ll just melt it and it will be ok. STOP! Melted butter is different than softened butter. The properties change, a solid becomes a liquid and when mixed with dry ingredients it changes the final outcome of the baked product. So if the recipe calls for softened butter, it needs to be soft not melted.

**How Long Does it Take to Soften Butter?** Left on the countertop at room temperature, a stick of butter takes at least 45 minutes to soften. If you’re the type who plans ahead, that’s no big deal. If not, here are a few ways to soften butter quickly.

**Method 1: Fairly Fast** - Our first method is the easiest: Simply cut the butter into cubes. The smaller the pieces, the quicker they’ll come to room temperature. Cut the butter stick in half so you have two long rectangles side by side. Stack them together and slice again. This yields four butter strips. Keep them stacked, and then slice perpendicular to your cuts. The butter will fall into cubes, and the cubes will soften fairly quickly, in about 15 minutes.

**Method 2: Faster** - The second method is more labor-intensive, but it will help the butter soften even faster. With a rolling pin, roll or pound the butter out flat. Whether rolling or pounding, the friction will warm the butter and the broader surface area will encourage faster softening. To minimize the mess, flatten the butter between two sheets of waxed paper. This prevents the butter from sticking to the rolling pin or the countertop.

**Method 3: Super-Fast** - The third method, shredding, creates a dirty dish, but it’s the quickest of the three. Partially unwrap the butter (use the wrapped half as a handle to keep your hand clean) and shred it using the largest holes of your box grater. The butter will reduce to a fluffy heap, similar in appearance to shredded mozzarella cheese. The principle here is the same as in the first method: Smaller pieces soften faster. Shredded butter is ready to use in your recipe right away.

**Method 4: The Lazy Way** - Place the butter and sugar into a stand mixer, and start creaming on low speed. (Higher speeds increase the likelihood that butter will catapult out of the bowl.) You’ll need to increase the mixing time to allow for the butter to warm and soften and for the aeration of the creaming process to take place. Sometimes I like to cream until the large chunks are broken into smaller ones and begin to mix with the sugar. Then I let it set for 15 minutes to complete the softening process.

**Method 5: The Microwave Way** - This method works, but can turn into a disaster rather quickly with melted butter instead of softened butter, so make sure you do each step as instructed and not hurry this process. Place wrapped stick of butter on microwave safe plate, microwave for 4 seconds, turn butter ¼ turn, repeat 3 more times.

Next time you’re ready to bake and your butter is hard and cold, try one of the 5 methods to soften that butter.

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