

foodbeam.com the stark realities of baking needn't stop you if you're careful. "Baking can turn into an expensive hobby, especially if you're anything like me: super-conscious about the ingredients' quality. To keep costs on the lower side, my best advice is to stay seasonal. Autumn and winter can seem a little sparse when it comes to harvests but ... consider it a challenge and make your best to tingle your imagination." Think apples, pears, quinces, and dress them up with jams and a little brandy.

20. Getting more done with less seems daunting, but sometimes a little planning helps. "One ingredient, one oven, two recipes", says baking blogger Sandra Avital.

"Try making a couple of different kinds of cookies: one using only egg yolks, the second using only whites then bake both the same day, in the same hour, even at the same time to make the best use of the oven." This cuts fuel costs and probably saves time too.

Australia and New Zealand

21. Donna Hay advises every harassed cooks to go-easy after the Christmas dinner, lighter on the stomach and more likely to leave everyone with a sweet memory. "My version of a bread and butter pudding has a festive spin but it's easier to cook than Christmas cake or pudding, uses less ingredients and takes less time to put together, saving you effort, money and time." says Donna. "Just use good-quality brioche soaked in brandy-spiked custard, sprinkle it with brandy-soaked muscatels and top it with demerara sugar to form a crunchy crust. It's a winner in my house!"

22. The great daddy of artisan baking in Australia is John Downes, the guy who started the sourdough movement down-under during the 70s. His Natural Tucker Bread Book (1983) was the prescient handbook for hardcore bakers and is still relevant today. John tells me "if you've been saying all year, 'gee, I'd love to try making a sourdough but I don't have the time' then Christmas is perfect," says John, "because you're in the house, warm but not too hot, around to nurture it through those delicate first steps.

23. For Dean Brettschnieder, the NZ artisan baker and author of The Global Baker, the best advice is more of an idea for life rather than a baking tip. "This year I'm in Shanghai for Christmas. What I'm going to do is make a batch of butter shortbread flavoured with dried cranberries and orange zest, and plan to wrap these as beautifully as I can and give them to the people in my life here who might otherwise have been incidental but, if I'm really honest, have helped me enormously through the last year."

Canada

24. The best way to give your creativity the support it needs is to get organised. Rather than restricting your style, it will give you the freedom to express yourself. Elizabeth Baird, author of The Complete Canadian Living Baking Book and food editor of the magazine reminded me that, however obvious it sounds, we all forget sometimes. "It's those simple things. Plan ahead so you have all the ingredients fresh and ready to bake. Read the recipe first so you don't forget an all-important ingredient. Then enjoy the whole process - the great aromas, the first taste and the fun of sharing something you've made."

25. I first tasted the sourdough breads of artisan baker Cliff Leir, made with the rare Red Fife wheat, at the Slow Food Terra Madre in 2006, and remember being struck with their extraordinary flavour. I spoke with him as he was setting up Fol Epi, his new bakery on Vancouver Island's Docks Green, and asked what his tip was for getting some of that flavour at home. "Try making your bread dough the day with just a tiny amount of yeast and let it ferment slowly overnight. Actually, as the nights are cold you can just put the dough in a covered bowl on the back porch rather than using the fridge. It's really sweet that way as you work with the elements."

26. "The economy may be harsh and cold on either side of the pond", says Marcy Goldman, editor of betterbaking.com "but home baking helps us feel warm and