How to Convert a Recipe

Have you ever found a recipe in a magazine or cookbook that you wished you could make but the ingredient quantities do not work? Whether you want to feed a crowd or feed a few, changing ingredients and amounts in any recipe to fit our needs can be challenging. These changes can adversely affect or ruin the end result of the dish that you are making. It is not just simple mathematics to divide or multiply the ingredients by the number of servings desired. There is an actual procedure for successfully changing the ingredient quantities for a different number of portions.

Let’s say you have a recipe that serves 8 people, but you want to make it for 2 people instead. Or even more complex, you have a recipe that serves 4 people, but you need to make it for 60.

It doesn’t matter whether you’re increasing a recipe or decreasing it — the procedure is the same for converting the ingredient quantities for a different number of portions/servings. This is called “scaling a recipe”.

To Scale a Recipe

There is some basic math involved in scaling a recipe. The first thing you need to do is calculate your conversion factor, which is the number you’re going to use to convert all the quantities of ingredients in the recipe that you wish to prepare.

To find the conversion factor, divide the desired number of portions/servings by the original number of servings that the recipe was meant to prepare. The resulting number is your conversion factor. Here’s the formula:

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\text{conversion factor} = \frac{\text{your desired number of servings}}{\text{original number of servings in the recipe}}
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Scaling that 8 portion recipe down to 2 portions involves two steps:

1. Divide 2 by 8, which give you a conversion factor of 0.25
2. Multiply each ingredient amount by 0.25

Let’s work through a simple example to illustrate how this works:

1. Your recipe calls for 2 quarts of chicken broth. You will multiply 2 quarts by your conversion factor of 0.25:

2. \(2 \text{ quarts} \times 0.25 = 0.5 \text{ quarts chicken broth}\)

What exactly is 0.5 quarts? We now have to convert 0.25 quarts into ounces. There are 32 ounces in a quart: \(32 \times 0.5 = 16 \text{ ounces}\)

1. To convert this into cups for easier measurement, the cooking conversion tool reminds us that there are 8 ounces in a cup: \(16 \div 8 = 2\)
2. This means that 0.5 quarts is equal to approximately 2 cups. Now you have the more accurate measurement for that ingredient to make the number of servings you desire.