



Grains of truth about BISCUITS

Definitions

Biscuits are a variety of quick breads popular in different forms throughout the United States. They are made from a combination of flour, shortening, leavening and milk or water. This simple dough is generally rolled out, cut into small rounds, baked and served hot. Food preferences and ingredients in various regions of the country often determine what type of biscuit is preferred. People in the North enjoy tall, tender flaky biscuits; people from the South like biscuits with a soft, tender crumb.

History

The original biscuit was a flat cake that was put back in the oven after being removed from its tin, hence the French name "*bis*" (twice) "*cuit*" (cooked). This very hard, dry biscuit was the staple for sailors and soldiers for centuries. During the time of Louis XIV, soldiers' biscuits were known as "stone bread."

"Animalized" biscuits were introduced later. They were thought to be very nutritious because they used meat juices as the liquid. In the 19th centuries, travelers' biscuits were hard cakes that kept well wrapped in a kind of tin foil.

Feathery, light biscuits originated in Southern plantation kitchens but, now are popular throughout the United States. Rolled biscuits were a staple at most meals, but beaten biscuits became another Southern favorite. Beaten biscuits are made light by beating air into the dough with a mallet or a rolling pin (up to 100 strokes "or more for company"). Beaten biscuits are typically thinner and crispier than baking powder biscuits.

Availability

Prepared biscuit mix can be purchased in grocery stores. Just add liquid, roll out the dough and bake according to package directions. The leading commercial mix is now available in a reduced-fat formulation. Biscuit dough in tubes will be located in the refrigerated section of supermarkets.

Recipes for making biscuits at home can be found in most all-purpose cookbooks. Rarely are biscuits available from a bakery because their shelf-life is so short.

Storage

It's best to enjoy biscuits steaming hot out of the oven because they do not contain preservatives that prevent staling. Biscuits tend to get hard and tasteless in a hurry, but they can be reheated for a short period of time in the microwave set at a low temperature. They also can be placed in a damp paper bag and reheated in a 350°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

To freeze baked biscuits, cool to room temperature and place in plastic freezer bags, pressing out as much air as possible. Do not freeze the biscuits for longer than two months. To thaw, let biscuits set at room temperature for 1 hour, unwrap and reheat in a microwave or oven.

To freeze biscuit dough, prepare and cut biscuits according to directions. Freeze, uncovered, on a cookie sheet about 2 to 4 hours, then place in freezer bags or stack in rigid containers with a piece of waxed paper between each biscuit. Cover and freeze for up to 3 to 4 weeks. Thaw biscuits unwrapped at room temperature about 1 hour. Bake in a preheated 425°F oven for 20 to 25 minutes.

Nutrition

Biscuits are high in fat, which makes them flaky, tender and delicious. The average home recipe has 50 percent of calories from fat, so budget fat calories accordingly. The average recipe also derives 43 percent of its calories from carbohydrates and 7 percent from protein.



Tips

- ◆ Want variety? Make biscuits extra large or small; roll them out thin; or, make them tall, crisp or soft, buttermilk or plain milk. They can be dropped from a spoon, cut with a knife, a floured biscuit cutter or a floured glass.
- ◆ Always sift dry ingredients together for even distribution of leavening. Otherwise, yellow or brown flecks result.
- ◆ For tender, flaky biscuits, cut shortening in thoroughly, using two knives, a fork or a pastry blender, until dough resembles meal.
- ◆ To make a soft dough, stir the liquid into the dry ingredients just until the dough leaves the side of the bowl and forms a ball. Knead gently 10 to 12 strokes to blend all ingredients and assure tall, plump, evenly textured biscuits. Kneading with the fingertips helps avoid over-handling.
- ◆ Cut dough straight down. Do not twist.
- ◆ For crusty biscuits, place $\frac{3}{4}$ inch apart for baking. For softer ones, place closer together. For a golden color, brush raw tops with milk.

Recipes

Basic Biscuits (reduced fat)

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shortening
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup skim milk

In a bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Cut in shortening. Add milk; stir until dough forms a soft ball.

Turn dough onto a floured board; knead lightly 20 to 25 times. Roll or pat to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thickness. Cut with a floured biscuit cutter or glass. Place on an ungreased baking sheet and bake at 425°F for 10 to 12 minutes. Makes 18 biscuits.

Nutritional Analysis: Each biscuit provides approximately: 82 calories; 2 g protein; 12 g carbohydrates; 3 g fat (1 g saturated); 0 g dietary fiber; 2 mg cholesterol; 23 mcg folate; 1 mg iron; 31 mg calcium; 32 mg potassium; 226 mg sodium.

Options:

Whole Wheat Biscuits: Substitute $\frac{7}{8}$ cup whole wheat flour for 1 cup all-purpose flour.

Cheese Drop Biscuits: Stir 1 cup grated cheese into flour mixture before adding shortening. Increase milk to 1 cup and drop biscuits onto baking sheets by large spoonfuls.

Buttermilk Biscuits: Substitute buttermilk for milk. Decrease Baking powder to 2 teaspoons and add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda to dry ingredients.

Beaten Biscuits (reduced fat)

- 3 cups flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda
- 3 tablespoons shortening
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cold skim milk

Sift together dry ingredients. Cut in shortening. Stir in milk.

Turn onto floured board and knead. Beat with a rolling pin until dough blisters, 100 whacks or more, folding edges in toward the center and turning after every few whacks. Roll dough to $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch thickness and cut with small round cutter. Using a fork, prick tops two or three times.

Arrange on lightly greased baking sheet and bake at 375°F for 30 minutes, or until light golden. Makes about 30 thin biscuits.

Nutritional Analysis: One biscuit provides approximately: 59 calories; 2 g protein; 10 g carbohydrates; 1 g fat (1 g saturated); 0 g dietary fiber; 1 mg cholesterol; 20 mcg folate; 1 mg iron; 11 mg calcium; 24 mg potassium; 51 mg sodium.



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