

## Cornmeal Biscuits

MAKES 8 BISCUITS

TIME: 35 MINUTES

(INCLUDES 20 MINUTES BAKING  
AND COOLING TIME)

*Bake the biscuits immediately after cutting them; letting them stand for any length of time can decrease the leavening power and thereby prevent the biscuits from rising properly in the oven. The biscuits are best eaten within 1 hour of baking.*

- 1½ cups (7½ ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (2¾ ounces) yellow cornmeal
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups heavy cream

1. Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

2. Whisk together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Add the cream and stir with a wooden spoon until a dough forms, about 30 seconds. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured countertop and knead by hand for 30 seconds.

3. Following the illustrations on page 368, cut the dough into 8 wedges. Place the wedges on the parchment-lined baking sheet.

4. Bake until the biscuit tops are light brown, 15 to 18 minutes. Cool the biscuits on a wire rack for 5 minutes. Serve warm.

### ➤ VARIATIONS

#### Cornmeal Biscuits with Corn Kernels

*This dough may be slightly stickier than the basic cornmeal biscuit recipe. Use kernels cut from 1 large ear or thawed frozen kernels. See photo of this recipe on page 160.*

Follow the recipe for Cornmeal Biscuits, increasing the amount of flour to 1⅔ cups (8¼ ounces) and whisking ¾ cup corn kernels into the dry ingredients.

#### Cornmeal Biscuits with Cheddar and Jalapeños

Follow the recipe for Cornmeal Biscuits, whisking 2 tablespoons minced jalapeño chiles and ½ cup (2 ounces) sharp cheddar cheese cut into ¼-inch pieces into the dry ingredients. Increase the baking time to 18 to 20 minutes.

#### Cornmeal Biscuits with Fresh Herbs

*Marjoram, rosemary, sage, and thyme all work well in these fragrant biscuits.*

Follow the recipe for Cornmeal Biscuits, whisking 2 tablespoons minced fresh herbs into the dry ingredients.

## SWEET POTATO BISCUITS

SWEET POTATO ROLLS HAVE AN EARTHY orange color and a sweet, tender crumb that complements everything on the holiday dinner table. Most sweet potato roll recipes call for yeast, which means softening the yeast in warm water, kneading the yeasted dough, rising, proofing, shaping, and baking. Realistically, who has this kind of time during holiday meal preparation? We wanted to create a sweet potato roll that could be made and baked in under an hour to better fit a busy holiday schedule. We figured a biscuit, rather than a yeasted roll, was our best bet.

We went through our biscuit recipes and found two possible models: Cornmeal Biscuits (left) and Cinnamon Buns (basically a quick biscuit made with buttermilk instead of cream and a couple of tablespoons of melted butter;



see page 375). To turn them into sweet potato biscuits, we added 1 cup mashed canned sweet potatoes to each recipe and judged the results. Neither was a winner.

The cornmeal biscuit recipe (we replaced the cornmeal with flour) enhanced with sweet potatoes produced biscuits that were leaden and flavorless. When sweet potatoes were added to the cinnamon bun recipe (sans cinnamon filling, of course), the result was even worse; these biscuits were leaden and flavorless and rubbery. We decided to go with the lesser of two evils and try to spin our cornmeal biscuit recipe into sweet potato biscuits.

First, we had to resolve the texture issue. In our next test, we upped the baking powder to 1 tablespoon to help lift the heavy sweet potato-enhanced dough. These biscuits were much lighter—and better. Because sweet potatoes contain so much moisture, we wanted to add just enough cream to moisten the dry ingredients and make a soft, workable dough. After several tests, we cut the amount of cream to just  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup.

We also made changes to improve the flavor of the biscuits. First, we doubled the amount of salt to 1 teaspoon. Although this sounds like a lot—especially for only eight biscuits—the sweet potatoes seemed to suck it all away. For sugar, we tested granulated against light and dark brown sugar. Dark brown sugar produced an earthy-colored biscuit with a deep, molasses twang, and it became our sweetener of choice. However, it didn't resolve all of our flavor issues. We decided to see how the biscuits would taste with a little ground cinnamon added to the dry ingredients. This addition provided the warmth we were looking for. Tasters reacted even more positively when we also included a little freshly grated nutmeg.

But the biscuits still seemed somewhat dull. Then we had an idea: Would lightly cooking

the sweet potatoes before adding them to the dry biscuit ingredients help? We had success using this method when we were developing our pumpkin pie recipe many years ago. We found that simply warming the pumpkin filling for a few minutes on the stovetop provided a rounder pumpkin flavor. We decided to warm the sweet potatoes along with the sugar and the spices in the microwave to save time. Sure enough, this intensified the sweet potato flavor in the biscuits.

We baked the biscuits in a 425-degree oven until they were slightly browned. It took a lot of willpower to hold back, but we concluded that a minimum 10-minute cooling period brought all of the flavors together nicely. Unlike our cream biscuits, which must be eaten within an hour of baking (because the dough contains no butter or oil, they go stale quickly), these biscuits stayed fresh for a surprisingly long time. The sweet potato's starches and high sugar content retained moisture well, and we enjoyed these biscuits up to 24 hours after we baked them.

## Sweet Potato Biscuits

MAKES 8 BISCUITS

TIME: 50 MINUTES

(INCLUDES 35 MINUTES BAKING  
AND COOLING TIME)

*Bake the biscuits immediately after cutting them; letting them stand for any length of time can decrease the leavening power and thereby prevent the biscuits from rising properly in the oven.*

- 2 cups (10 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour, plus  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup for dusting the work surface
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 (15-ounce) can sweet potatoes in light syrup, drained



- 1/4 cup packed (1 3/4 ounces) dark brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 3/4 cup heavy cream

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

2. Whisk together 2 cups flour, the baking powder, and the salt in a large bowl.

3. Mash the sweet potatoes with a fork or potato masher in a microwave-safe bowl. Add the brown sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg and

stir with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to combine. Microwave on high power until the sweet potatoes are warmed through and the sugar is completely dissolved, 2 1/2 to 3 minutes. Stir to combine, add the cream, and whisk until somewhat smooth (there will be a few lumps) and homogeneous in color.

4. Add the sweet potato mixture to the dry ingredients and use a rubber spatula to combine. Transfer the dough to a work surface dusted with the remaining 1/4 cup flour. Gently knead the dough by hand until it comes together (it will be sticky), about 1 minute.

### EQUIPMENT: Digital Scales

Every serious cook needs an accurate scale for weighing fruits, vegetables, and meats. When making muffins, biscuits, cakes, and cookies, a scale is especially critical. Professional bakers know that measuring flour by volume can be problematic. A cup of flour can weigh between 4 and 6 ounces, depending on the type of flour, the humidity, whether or not it has been sifted, and the way it was put into the cup. Weight is a much more accurate way to measure flour.

Kitchen scales come in two basic types. Mechanical scales operate on a spring and lever system. When an item is placed on the scale, internal springs are compressed. The springs are attached to levers, which move a needle on the scale's display (a ruler with lines and numbers printed on a piece of paper and glued to the scale). The more the springs are compressed, the farther the needle moves along the ruler.

Electronic, or digital, scales have two plates that are clamped at a fixed distance. The bottom plate is stationary; the top plate is not. When food is placed on the platform attached to the top plate, the distance between the plates changes slightly. The movement of the top plate (no more than 1/1000 inch) causes a change in the flow of electricity through the scale's circuitry. This change is translated into a weight and expressed in numbers displayed on the face of the scale.

We tested ten electronic scales and nine mechanical

scales. As a group, the electronic scales were vastly preferred. Their digital displays were much easier to read than the measures on most mechanical scales, where the lines on the ruler are so closely spaced it's impossible to nail down the precise weight within 1/2 ounce. Also, many mechanical scales weigh items only within a limited range—usually between 1 ounce and 5 pounds. What's the point of owning a scale that can't weigh a large chicken or roast? Most electronic scales handle items that weigh as much as 10 pounds and as little as 1/4 ounce.

Among the electronic scales we tested, we found several features that make the difference between a good electronic scale and a great one. First, readability is a must. The displayed numbers should be large. Also, they should be steeply angled and as far from the weighing platform as possible. If the display is too close to the platform, the numbers can hide beneath the rim of a dinner plate or cake pan.

An automatic shut-off feature saves battery life, but this feature can be annoying, especially if the shut-off cycle kicks in at under 2 minutes. A scale that shuts off automatically after 5 minutes or more is easier to use.

A large weighing platform (which detaches for easy cleaning) is another plus. Last, we preferred electronic scales that display weight increments in decimals rather than fractions. The former are more accurate and easier to work with when scaling a recipe up or down.