

Biscuits traced to first century Roman bread

James Villas in "Biscuit Bliss" celebrates how much of a regional phenomenon biscuit and scone making is. He talks about how biscuits have been part of the South's cultural backbone along with pork barbecue and fruit cobblers. The following information and recipes are from "Biscuit Bliss".

Biscuit comes from the Latin bis ("twice") and coctus ("cooked") which refers to a crude Roman bread made in the first century A.D. The English developed bysquytes and the Scots skonn's (scones) during the Middle Ages. In France by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the pain bis-cuit ("twice-baked bread") had evolved. The English and French biscuits were probably an unleavened, dry, hard flat-bread or cracker. These were first cooked on a griddle, then baked and were used for military troops on the move as a spoilage resistant ration. These were probably the "ship's biscuit" common on ships headed to colonial America and the first whaling boats of New England. In 1828 Webster defined biscuit as "a composition of flour and butter, made and baked in private families." A few years later baking soda was introduced and the American style "soda biscuit" resulted. In 1856 commercial baking powder and in 1868 commercial yeast made their first appearances.

Sour Milk Biscuits
Makes 12 to 16 biscuits
2 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder



pat schiefen

• postscript

1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
4 teaspoons chilled lard or vegetable shortening
1 cup sour whole milk
Preheat the oven 425 degrees.
Whisk flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda in a large mixing bowl. Cut in lard with a pastry cutter until mixture is mealy. Add milk until a soft, sticky dough forms. Add a little more sour milk is necessary.
To a lightly floured work surface place dough and knead about 8 times. Pat dough out until it is 1/2 to 3/4 inch thick and using a biscuit cutter cut rounds. Put scraps together and cut more rounds.
Arrange on baking sheet about 1/2 inch apart and bake in the upper third of the oven until golden brown about 15 minutes.

Kansas Fruit Biscuits
Makes 10 biscuits
2 cups flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons chilled vegetable shortening
3/4 cup whole milk
2 tablespoons butter, melted
2 tablespoons firmly packed light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 cup finely chopped dark raisins
Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Grease a baking sheet and set aside.
Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt in a large mixing bowl. Cut in shortening with a pastry cutter until mixture is a mealy. Add milk and stir with a fork until a soft ball forms.
On a lightly floured work surface knead dough about 8 times. Pat dough until 1/2 inch thick and brush half the dough with melted butter. Top the buttered half with brown sugar, cinnamon and lastly the raisins. Fold the other half of dough over the top and press down slightly. Pinch the edges together and cut out with a 2 1/2 biscuit cutter.
On the baking sheet arrange the rounds about 1 inch apart. Bake in the center of the oven until golden brown about 12 minutes. Serve at room temperature or hot.

Jalapeno Buttermilk Biscuits
Makes 6 biscuits
2 cups flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup chilled lard, cut into pieces
2 small jalapeno chiles, seeded and minced
1 cup buttermilk
Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
Whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large mixing bowl. Rub in the lard with your fingertips until the mixture is mealy. Add jalapeno and buttermilk. Stir till blended but still sticky. On a lightly floured work surface knead about 8 times. Pat out until 1/2 inch thick and cut out rounds with 3 inch biscuit cutter. Pat scraps together and cut out more rounds.
On a large baking sheet arrange about 1 inch apart and bake in the center of the oven until golden brown about 15 minutes.
Split biscuits in half, arrange on a plate and spoon chili over the top.

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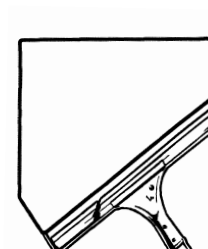
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