

Easiest-Ever Biscuits

We combine two classic methods (and break a cardinal rule) to make tender, fluffy biscuits that come together in record time.

≧ BY ANDREA GEARY ≦

A fresh, warm biscuit instantly doubles the coziness quotient of practically anything you serve it with: chicken stew, vegetable soup, fried eggs, or—my favorite accompaniment—another fresh, warm biscuit. But mastering the traditional biscuit-making technique takes some practice.

First, you combine flour with salt, baking powder, and maybe a bit of sugar (a highly contentious addition—more about that later) and then toss in cubes of cold butter, which you crumble and flatten until precisely the right amount of tiny butter flakes are strewn evenly throughout the flour. Next, you stir in cold milk or buttermilk—masters of the art emphasize that everything must remain frigid—until the mixture forms a shaggy dough. Finally, you transfer the mass of dough to the counter, gently roll or pat it out, and cut out rounds with a sharp biscuit cutter before transferring them to the oven and baking them for about 15 minutes.

It's not difficult, but there are rules that must be followed, and all that mashing of the butter and rolling and cutting can get messy. Happily, there are shortcuts.

Want to skip cutting in the butter? Make cream biscuits: Replace both the butter and the milk with



For a glossy, rich finish, we like to brush the biscuits with melted butter when they are fresh from the oven.

heavy cream. Thanks to the cream's generous butterfat content, the biscuits will be plenty rich and tender. This formula makes a pretty stiff dough, so you'll still have to roll and cut.

Want to skip rolling and cutting? Make drop biscuits: Start by cutting the butter into the dry ingredients in the traditional way, but add extra buttermilk or milk so that the dough has a wetter consistency. Simply drop scoops of the soft dough onto the baking sheet and bake.

Cream biscuits tend to be more uniform and have a subtly layered structure, while drop biscuits are more craggy, with a beautifully tender, cake-like crumb. Why couldn't I have the benefits of both styles and make a dropped cream biscuit, aka "dream biscuit"? As that nickname suggests, it would be the easiest biscuit ever.

Getting Creamed

I wondered if things could be as simple as adding more cream to a cream biscuit dough until it was loose enough to drop.

I whisked together 3 cups of all-purpose flour, a tablespoon of baking powder, and a teaspoon of salt and then experimented with adding enough cream to make a scoopable dough, which turned out to be 3 cups— $\frac{3}{4}$ cup more than the usual amount called for. I then deposited scoops of the dough on a parchment-lined baking sheet and baked them in a 400-degree oven.

Sounds so easy that it makes you wonder why cookbooks aren't bursting with dropped-cream-biscuit recipes, right? Here's why: It didn't work. The dough mounds spread as they baked and came out looking like bland, lumpy cookies. They had a pleasantly milky flavor, a tender crumb, and a crisp exterior, but they left thick, greasy spots on the parchment and a slick on my fingers.

Clearly, the additional moisture and fat from the extra cream were the source of these problems. But I couldn't reduce the amount of cream—that would bring me right back where I'd started, with a dough that was too dry to drop. Maybe

I was asking for the impossible: a dough that was moist and scoopable before baking but that acted like a drier, less fatty dough in the oven, rising instead of spreading out. And I was expecting that a single ingredient, cream, would perform this miracle.

Less Really Is More

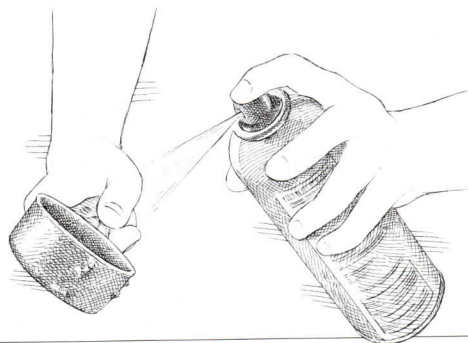
That was when I had a revelation. Cream isn't a single ingredient, it's two: water (with a little protein and sugar mixed in) and solid fat. The fat particles in cream are so minute that we don't perceive them as solid, and they were stowing away in the cream only to melt in the heat of the oven, making the biscuits greasy and, in combination with the water in the cream, causing them to spread.

A new thunderbolt struck: What if I melted the fat by warming the cream before I mixed it into the dough? That sound you just heard was the collective gasp of generations of horrified Southern bakers, but hear me out: Maybe heating the cream would increase its fluidity enough to enable me to make a scoopable dough with less of it. If so, that could potentially fix both the spreading and the greasiness.

TECHNIQUE

KEEP THE SCOOP SLICK

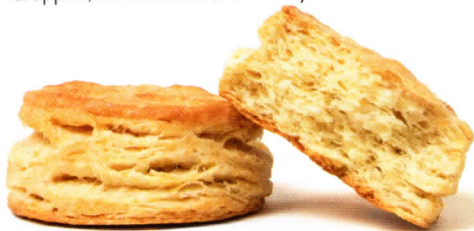
To ensure that the dough releases easily from the measuring cup, we spray it with vegetable oil spray after every three or four scoops.



▶ STEP-BY-STEP VIDEO AND NUTRITION INFORMATION
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Making Biscuits Just Got Easier

Biscuits are traditionally made in three styles: classic, cream, and drop. By creating a cream biscuit that can be dropped, we invented a fourth style that's the easiest biscuit imaginable to make.



CLASSIC: FUSSIEST

Method: Cut cold butter into dry ingredients, moisten with milk, roll out, and cut

Results: Flat top; distinctly flaky, layered interior



CREAM: SKIPS CUTTING IN BUTTER

Method: Substitute cream for butter and milk, roll out, and cut

Results: Flat top; subtly layered interior



DROP: SKIPS ROLLING OUT DOUGH

Method: Cut in butter, add enough milk to form dough that can be dropped

Results: Craggy top; slightly irregular interior



CREAM/DROP: NO BUTTER CUTTING OR ROLLING OUT

Method: Use less cream than in cream biscuit; warm it to create dough that is loose enough to be dropped

Results: Subtly craggy top; fluffy, cake-like interior

EASIEST-EVER BISCUITS

SERVES 10 TOTAL TIME: 40 MINUTES

These biscuits come together very quickly, so in the interest of efficiency, start heating your oven before gathering your ingredients. We like these biscuits brushed with a bit of melted butter, but you can skip that step if you're serving the biscuits with a rich accompaniment such as sausage gravy.

- 3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 4 teaspoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 1¼ teaspoons table salt
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted (optional)

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. In medium bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Microwave cream until just warmed to body temperature (95 to 100 degrees), 60 to 90 seconds, stirring halfway through microwaving. Stir cream into flour mixture until soft, uniform dough forms.

2. Spray ⅓-cup dry measuring cup with vegetable oil spray. Drop level scoops of batter 2 inches apart on prepared sheet (biscuits should measure

SCIENCE

WHY WE "MELT" THE CREAM IN OUR BISCUITS

Fridge-cold cream looks like it's 100 percent liquid, but it's actually a combination of water, protein, and sugar, with tiny particles of solid butterfat suspended throughout. By warming the cream just enough to melt the fat particles (but not enough to activate the baking powder when the cream is mixed into the dry ingredients), we turn it into a pure liquid. This means we can use less cream to create a dough that is still loose enough to scoop and drop but that doesn't spread too much or bake up too greasy. To demonstrate this effect, we made two doughs using 2 cups of cream. In one batch, the cream was fridge-cold; in the other, we warmed it. The dough made with the warmed cream was noticeably loose and easy to scoop.



COLD CREAM

Dough is too dry to drop.



WARMED CREAM

Dough is loose and scoopable.

about 2½ inches wide and 1¼ inches tall). Respray measuring cup after every 3 or 4 scoops. If portions are misshapen, use your fingertips to gently reshape dough into level cylinders. Bake until tops are light golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Brush hot biscuits with melted butter, if using. Serve warm. (Biscuits can be stored in zipper-lock bag at room temperature for up to 24 hours. Reheat biscuits in 300-degree oven for 10 minutes.)