

Heritage Recipes

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Old-Fashioned Southern Baked Cornbread

From Sonja

Variations of this cornbread recipe were used by both my paternal and maternal grandmothers, my mothers, and most of my aunts. I was taught to cook by my grandmothers. Grandma Barton, my paternal grandmother, always said that cornbread never had any sugar added. If sugar was added (a Yankee heresy), it was no longer cornbread but Johnnie Cake. I usually cook the way my grandmothers taught me, seldom measuring, except by hand and eye. The ingredients listed below are close estimates for the recipe handed down from grandmothers to granddaughter. The flavor and texture of this cornbread is much improved if one uses stone ground cornmeal rather than the commercial bolted variety.

Old-Fashioned Southern Baked Cornbread

.1 1/2 cups stone ground cornmeal (white, yellow, or blue)
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt
4 tablespoons olive oil or melted bacon fat, divided
1 cup (or more) buttermilk

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. In large bowl, mix cornmeal, baking powder, flour, salt, 2 tablespoons of the oil or fat, and 1 cup of buttermilk. If cornbread batter is too thick (should be the pour-able consistency of pancake batter), add more buttermilk.

Have a large cast-iron skillet with the remaining 2 tablespoons oil or fat heating on a burner. Heat until skillet and oil are very hot, but do not allow the fat to get hot enough to smoke. Leaving heat on under skillet, pour batter into sizzling hot skillet. This insures a nice, crispy crust and a tender middle. Allow batter to cook for about 30 seconds to 1 minute or until bubbles around edges of batter begin to look a bit dry. Instantly remove skillet from burner and turn immediately into preheated oven to bake until top is a deep golden brown (about

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20 to 25 minutes). Remove skillet from oven, loosen edges and bottom of cornbread (if skillet has been properly seasoned, this step should be an easy one) and turn bread onto serving plate so that the crisp bottom side is uppermost. It is now ready to cut and serve immediately.

If you make cornbread frequently, reserve one large cast-iron skillet, season it well, and use it exclusively for baking cornbread or homemade biscuits. A well-used, properly cared for cast-iron skillet will eventually become so seasoned that you will seldom have any trouble with the cornbread crust sticking to the bottom of the skillet.

Most old-timey country folks did not cut their cornbread. They took it to the table whole and allowed each person to use his fingers and break off his own individual-sized portion.

The above bread is delicious crumbled warm into a glass of cold milk and eaten with a spoon. My family enjoyed many a supper of hot cornbread and cold milk when I was a child. This cornbread is also a basic ingredient, paired with crumbled commercial white bread, in old-fashioned cornbread dressing for that Thanksgiving turkey or hen.

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