

Tips for Quick Bread Baking

Quick breads couldn't be easier to prepare. Mix dry ingredients in one bowl, wet in another, combine and pour into your greased baking pan. Keeping these tips in mind will provide the very best results, though.

- » Measure leavening correctly. Too much baking powder or baking soda may give your quick breads a bitter aftertaste. It can also make them too dry and crumbly and cause them to rise too quickly in the oven and then fall. Not enough, on the other hand, can leave you with a cloying, heavy texture.
- » Stir your batter until the ingredients are just combined. A few lumps are fine, and over mixing will make your bread rubbery.
- » To test for doneness, insert a toothpick or a sharp knife into the center of your bread. If it comes out clean, it's ready.
- » To keep your quick bread from crumbling when you slice it, it's a good idea (if not always practical) to let it cool before slicing. When you do slice, use a sharp knife in a sawing motion (rather than pressing downward).
- » Don't worry about that crack on the top of your quick bread. It's par for the course and won't affect the taste at all.
- » If you want to use a different pan for your recipe (muffin tins, corn sticks, even cans), just fill 1/2 to 2/3 full of batter and adjust the baking time. (If using mini pans, for example, decrease baking time by half.)
- » Don't overfill your muffin tins or the muffins will be misshapen. To avoid tunnels in your muffins, don't over mix or use too high a baking temperature.
- » To keep small pieces of fruit (like raisins) and nuts from sinking to the bottom of the pan during baking, dust them with flour before adding to your batter.

Why Buy Bulk Spices?

Want the freshest spices along with the most flexibility and fun while shopping? Then buying in bulk is for you. Comparison shop for a few spices, and you'll see why bulk is your best choice:

» Price

You'll pay from three to 10 times more for the same amount of spice if you buy it in bottles instead of in bulk! (You—and the environment—have to pay for all those jars and labels, after all.)

» Freshness

As you measure your spices from the bulk jars, relish the aroma, color and texture of each. You know that these spices are fresh because the stock is updated often. They're bright, not faded, richly aromatic, not faint. Your senses can't judge the color or aroma of prepackaged spices, because they're hidden away.

» Versatility

Whether you're stocking up on your favorite cooking staples or just buying a pinch of this or that for a particular recipe, when you buy in bulk, you'll always have the right amount. You don't have to buy an entire package of that exotic spice you'll use only once a year, and you don't have to purchase multiple packages of a basic pickling spice to last through canning season.

» Fun

With bulk spices, you can decide to buy a smidgen of something that strikes your fancy just for fun (chances are there will be plenty of enticing choices). Once home, you'll enjoy replenishing your spice jars, and you'll look forward to cooking with these wonderful, fresh seasonings. Shopping for bulk spices is an all-around satisfying experience!

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BREADS



Quick Breads

Recipes for ...

- » Cardamom Almond Banana Bread
- » Rosemary Saffron Cornbread
- » Crazy for Cranberry Muffins

... and more!

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Q&A

What's the difference between baking powder and baking soda?

Both baking powder and baking soda are used to make baked goods rise; they're called leavening agents. Baking soda is sodium bicarbonate. When combined with moisture and an acidic ingredient (like buttermilk or lemon juice), a chemical reaction produces bubbles of carbon dioxide that expand during baking, causing the batter to rise. This action begins in the bowl, so batters made with baking soda should be mixed and quickly slid into the oven (don't mix ahead); otherwise, they may rise too quickly and then "fall" in the oven.

Baking powder contains baking soda as well as an acidic ingredient (cream of tartar). Single acting baking powder rises as soon as it's activated by moisture. It needs to be put in the oven quickly. Double-acting baking powder has two reactions—one when the ingredients are combined in the bowl and another during baking, once it reaches higher temperatures.

In general, you can't substitute one for another in a recipe. But you can make your own baking powder by combining two parts cream of tartar with one part baking soda.

What's a scone? What kind of spices can I use to flavor scones?

A scone is a Scottish quick bread. Traditionally they were triangular only and baked on a griddle. Today you can find round and square scones, most often baked in an oven. You can vary a basic scone recipe by adding a wide range of dried fruits, nuts, sweets (like chocolate chips) and spices. Try raisin scones with cinnamon and allspice, lemon scones with cardamom, chocolate chip scones with nutmeg, and molasses scones with ginger, for example.

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Quick Breads



The best thing about quick breads isn't that they're quick, though that's certainly a bonus. (With no rising of yeast or shaping of dough to slow you down, you can have a quick bread batter in the oven in just minutes.) Even better, though—quick breads are delicious. And versatile. A quick bread can round out a soup lunch, serve as a festive appetizer or dessert, or provide a healthful after-school boost.

You can vary quick breads by using an array of nuts, dried or fresh fruits, and sweeteners. Include nutrition boosters like wheat germ, oats, and powdered milk. Try different pans (loaf pans, muffin tins, shaped baking pans, even cans). And whether you're starting with an heirloom recipe or are inventing your own signature loaf as you go, use spices to make your quick breads richly distinctive.

Rosemary Saffron Cornbread

The clean taste of rosemary and the lovely color of saffron distinguish this light, northern cornbread.

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| ½ teaspoon saffron | 2 large eggs, beaten |
| 1 ½ cup cornmeal | 1 cup buttermilk |
| ½ cup unbleached flour | 3 tablespoons melted butter, cooled to warm |
| 2 teaspoons baking powder | 2 tablespoons honey |
| ½ teaspoon baking soda | ½ cup corn kernels (fresh or frozen) |
| ½ teaspoon sea salt | |
| 1 tablespoon rosemary leaf | |



Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Place the saffron in a small bowl with 1 tablespoon hot water. Set aside. Combine all of the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Make a well in the center and set aside. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining ingredients. Drain the saffron and add to the wet ingredients. Add the wet ingredients to the well in the dry ingredients and stir until the mixture is just moistened throughout. Spread evenly in a greased, 9-inch square baking pan and bake until bread tests done, about 25 minutes.

A Date with Maple Loaf

This is a dense quick bread, a bit like fruit cake, but without the reputation. Serve each slice with a dollop of vanilla yogurt on top.

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| 2 cups flour | ¾ cup maple syrup |
| 1 ½ teaspoons baking powder | ½ cup water |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ground | 1 teaspoon lemon peel |
| ½ teaspoon allspice | 2 eggs, beaten |
| ¼ teaspoon nutmeg, ground | 1 cup dates, chopped |
| ¼ teaspoon cloves, ground | ¼ cup raisins |
| ¼ teaspoon sea salt | ½ cup pecans, chopped |
| ¼ cup melted butter, cooled to warm | |



Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, spices and salt. Make a well in the center and set aside. In another bowl, combine the butter, syrup, water, lemon peel and eggs. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. Fold in the dates, raisins, and pecans. Spread into an oiled loaf pan and bake until bread tests done, about 45 minutes.

Cardamom Almond Banana Bread

The aroma of this loaf will make it hard for you to wait until it cools to cut it! Serve it warm, then, with cream cheese.

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| 1 ¾ cups unbleached flour | 1 egg plus 2 egg whites, beaten |
| ½ cup rolled oats | 1 cup mashed bananas |
| 1 teaspoon baking soda | ¼ cup oil or melted butter |
| ¼ teaspoon sea salt | 1 tablespoon milk |
| ½ teaspoon cardamom ground | 1 tablespoon lemon juice |
| ¼ teaspoon cinnamon ground | 1 teaspoon almond extract |
| ½ teaspoon nutmeg ground | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| ½ cup chopped almonds | |

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine dry ingredients in a large bowl. Make a well in the center and set aside. Combine remaining ingredients in another bowl. Mix until smooth. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and mix with a spoon until just combined. Pour into an oiled loaf pan and bake until loaf tests done, about 45 minutes.

Crazy for Cranberry Muffins

Try this healthful muffin for breakfast—or any time you want something to satisfy your sweet tooth and your need for a nutritious snack. Blueberries work as well—visually and taste-wise—as the cranberries.

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| 1 ½ cups unbleached wheat flour | 1 cup chopped walnuts |
| 1 cup sugar or ½ cup sugar and ½ cup maple syrup powder | 1 ½ cups fresh cranberries |
| ½ cup rolled oats | 1 cup buttermilk or ¼ cup buttermilk powder and 1 cup milk |
| ¼ cup wheat germ | 2 eggs |
| 1 teaspoon baking powder | ¼ cup vegetable oil |
| 1 teaspoon baking soda | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| ½ teaspoon cinnamon ground | ¼ cup maple syrup granules (optional) |
| ½ teaspoon nutmeg ground | |

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine dry ingredients in a large bowl. Mix well. Gently stir in cranberries. In a separate bowl, combine the buttermilk, eggs, oil, and vanilla extract. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and mix until just blended. Spoon into lined or oiled muffin tins, filling all the way to the top. Sprinkle with maple syrup granules, if desired. Bake about 25 minutes, or until inserted toothpick comes out clean. Makes about 18 muffins.