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Home-Made Biscuits

By BRENDA CLEEVE

BISCUIT-MAKING is a particularly satisfying form of home cookery because of its infinite variety and because with modern machine-mixing and refrigeration it is a fairly simple matter to keep stocks of biscuits or a variety of mixtures on hand to suit all tastes.

Sweet or plain, crisp and crunchy or soft and smooth-textured, large or small and in fascinating range of shapes, colours and flavours—biscuits are popular with young and old.

SOME GENERAL HINTS

Biscuits of the type in which the mixture is dropped on to a flat tray tend to spread more on a greased surface than an ungreased one. In some mixtures it may not be necessary to grease the tray—experience will teach in this case.

Where greasing is necessary but it is desirable to curb the spreading tendency of the mixture, try applying the grease with a brush, only greasing evenly-spaced patches of the tray.

When using a new recipe, try an experimental batch to determine how much space is required for spreading. Biscuits such as brandy snaps which spread to a thin lacy layer need to be at least three inches apart on the tray.

If you have only a limited number of oven trays, use deeper tins such as baking dishes turned upside down. Many people prefer these as the biscuits slide off easily without breaking.

Aluminium foil, which is available quite cheaply, can be used to speed up biscuit cooking. If insufficient baking trays are to hand, cut pieces of foil to the size of each available tray and place the prepared biscuits on the sheets of foil. When one batch of biscuits is cooked, the foil can be slipped off and another piece, already loaded with uncooked mixture, slipped on so that continuous cooking can be carried on without the tedious washing and greasing of trays and waiting for trays to cool. The pieces of foil may be used over and over again until they become too brittle and crack.

Most biscuits should be slightly undercooked, i.e., the surface should be soft and show a slight finger pressure when tested before removing from the oven. Make sure they are not too soft and sticky however, as such biscuits will be too raw. The cooking is completed on the tray while they are being loosened from the surface, and by the time the biscuits are quite cold they will be crisp. If biscuits are kept in the oven until they become crisp they will be hard and uninteresting and may break as they are being removed from the trays.

For really successful baking, all biscuits in each batch should be of even size and thickness. This applies particularly to dropped mixtures and refrigerator biscuits. To ensure an even size and shape in dropped mixtures use a level spoon measure.

Biscuits should be allowed to stand until quite cold before being stored. Careful storage is essential if the special characteristics of each biscuit are to be preserved. Some biscuits will be found to have an improved flavour after storage. For biscuits, especially the crisp type, an airtight container is essential. Crisp and soft varieties require separate containers to prevent the crisp ones becoming soft.

To moisten biscuits of the soft type, place a slice of apple or orange in the storage container, remembering to replace the slices with fresh ones at frequent intervals.

REFRIGERATOR BISCUITS

This is the name commonly given to biscuits made from a mixture which can be prepared at any convenient time and stored in the form of a roll—covered with waxed paper—in the refrigerator. These mixtures do not need to be held in the freezing compartment, but will keep almost indefinitely without deterioration on the ordinary refrigerator shelves.

Most of the biscuits are made by cutting slices $\frac{1}{8}$ th to $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch thick from the roll of mixture and then cooking them in the normal manner. Any mixture not used may be returned to the "fridge" for use later.

The mixtures are usually kneaded slightly to ensure an even texture throughout and should then be formed into suitably-sized rolls. After wrapping in waxed paper chill thoroughly for not less than four hours, but preferably overnight or longer.

Do not place newly-prepared mixtures on grid-type refrigerator shelves without using a sheet of cardboard or something similar to prevent the grids leaving impressions on the rolls and spoiling the shape of the biscuits.

Use only a very sharp knife for cutting the slices.

Basic Recipe.

This is the same as that used for many biscuits cooked and prepared in the normal way and is one which can be varied by the addition of flavouring ingredients.

Beat 4 oz. of butter or margarine with 2 oz. of sugar until soft and creamy. Add the yolk of an egg and half a teaspoonful of flavouring essence. Stir in 8 oz. of plain flour. Turn the mixture on to a floured board and knead slightly. Form into rolls 2 in. thick. Wrap in waxed paper and chill thoroughly. Cut in thin slices, then place on a greased tray and bake in a moderate oven for eight to ten minutes. The time of cooking will depend on the thickness of the slices and with the chilled mixture it is possible to cut very fine slices which require much less baking time.

To vary this recipe add such flavouring ingredients as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped nuts, 1 tablespoon of finely grated orange or lemon rind. Two ounces of cooled melted chocolate may be beaten into the creamed fat and sugar. Brown sugar may also be substituted for white.

Cinnamon Crisps.

Beat together one cup of margarine or butter and one cup of sugar—use half brown and half white. Add two eggs gradually. Stir in half a cup of chopped nuts. Sift the following ingredients together and stir into the mixture—2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of baking soda, 3 teaspoons of cinnamon. Turn on to a floured board and knead slightly before forming into rolls and wrapping in greased paper. When thoroughly chilled cut into thin slices and place on baking trays which need not be greased. Bake in a moderate oven seven to ten minutes.

Malt Biscuits

Beat together 4 oz. butter or other fat and 3 oz. sugar. Stir in one dessertspoon of golden syrup and one tablespoon of liquid malt which have been warmed together. Stir in 8 oz. plain flour sifted with a pinch of salt. Lastly stir in one teaspoon of bi-carbonate of soda which has been dissolved in 2 teaspoons of warm milk. Make sure this last mixture is thoroughly and evenly combined with the other ingredients to give a mellow flavour

and an even colour to the baked biscuits. Form into rolls and chill. Bake in a moderate oven eight to ten minutes.

Ginger Biscuits.

Beat together $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fat and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar. Add one egg and beat thoroughly. Stir in 2 tablespoons of treacle. Sift together $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour, 2 teaspoons of ginger, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of bi-carbonate of soda and a pinch of salt. Form into rolls and chill thoroughly. Cut into slices and bake in a moderate oven for eight to ten minutes.

Cherry and Walnut Biscuits.

Beat 4 oz. butter or margarine with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar. Add one egg and then one tablespoon of treacle. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of

chopped cherries and nuts. A little chopped ginger may also be added for extra flavour. Stir in $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour into which has been sifted one teaspoon of bi-carbonate of soda. Form the mixture into rolls and chill. Cut into slices and bake in a slow oven ten to 15 minutes, depending on the thickness of the mixture.

Economical Fruit Biscuits.

Beat one tablespoon of butter or margarine with one cup of brown sugar and one egg. Add one teaspoon of flavouring essence. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of chopped nuts or other fruits. Add 2 cups of self-raising flour. Form into rolls about the diameter of a penny and chill. Cut into thin slices and bake in a moderate oven for eight to ten minutes.

SHRINKAGE OF FLOOR BOARDS IN HOT DRY WEATHER

The prolonged dry spell and excessive heat in Southern Australia have caused the shrinkage of flooring boards already laid, especially in recently built houses. The following notes from the C.S.I.R.O. Division of Forests Products may be of assistance to builders and house owners concerned with this problem. If the floors have been laid in accordance with the recommended practice concerning moisture content, they should return to their original condition within the next few months.

However, if the joints are still open after the usual sequence of seasonal movement, the following filling materials may be used:—

- (1) If floors are to be waxed, use an oil putty, and for colouring use the colour in oil.
- (2) If the floors are to be given a plastic finish, use a water putty, plastic wood, or a mixture of a fine sawdust and glue. For colouring, use a spirit stain for plastic wood, and a water stain for other filling materials.

It should be noted that where cracks over $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide still remain it is preferable to use thin slivers of timber glued into place and dressed off later, rather than attempt to bridge such gaps with any of the fillers mentioned above.

Valuable information on the subject is included in the Division of Forest Products Newsletter No. 238 which emphasises the importance of adopting every means in laying a timber floor to avoid subsequent trouble and costly maintenance. The use of a portable moisture meter to check the condition of the flooring before laying is strongly recommended. A copy of the Newsletter "The Effect of Moisture Change on Wooden Floors" may be obtained from the Building Research Liaison Service, P.O. Box 2807AA, Melbourne, by forwarding a 4d. stamp to cover mailing costs.