

the Quick and the Beautiful

Bake faster!
These quick
treats will get
you all the taste
and twice the
applause, in
half the time.

BY SERENA BASS

There's no more amusing kitchen trick than whipping up a quick bread out of nothing to the *oohs* and *ahs* of your guests. The thing with baking is that even though these recipes are for "quick" breads and hopefully "quick" muffins, they are only quick if you have the ingredients on hand. If you like the idea of baking (avoiding preservatives and mysterious additives) but only do it occasionally, it can become anything but quick.

Running to the store every time the inspiration is upon you for whole-wheat flour or sesame seeds is aggravating, life gets much easier if you put together a good baking cupboard. Decant your ingredients; the brown sugars, the dried fruit, the nuts—none will last as well in their original bags or boxes as they will in Ziplock bags. Sort your dried herbs and spices so you can access the cake ones quickly. In my kitchen, the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, baking powder, and baking soda, for instance, are all in the same area.

Then too, you'll be more aware when you are running out instead of thinking you have another jar... somewhere.

Decide where you are going to bake in your kitchen; ideally you'll find somewhere with enough surface space to measure, sift, beat, and fold ingredients. Choose a counter where you can do your vital 'mise en place' or just 'mise' as the chefs say. That is, getting out and measuring everything you'll need for the recipe and putting it in one spot. It may sound like double the work, but it actually saves time and mistakes. I admit (and really, who has not done this?) to carefully shutting the oven door on a carrot cake and turning to see two eggs or a cup of walnuts sitting right there on the kitchen table. My Mona Lisa smile of accomplishment exchanged for a Bugs Bunny eyes-out-on-springs and a loud or muffled curse.

So don't put yourself through all that and do get yourself situated nicely. These recipes will thank you.

BLUEBERRY BISCUITS
(RECIPE ON PAGE 59)

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FOOD STYLING KIMBERLY COLBURN



Easter Cake

MAKES 1 LOAF

This is a wonderfully Medieval, sticky, fragrant loaf. It's actually better the day after you make it. Somehow, it is not too sweet and in my fridge (I was away) it lasted well for 2 weeks. Note: Cake needs 1 hour advance work.

In advance

- 1 cup dates, each date cut across into 3
- 1 cup prunes, each prune cut into quarters
- ½ cup golden raisins
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup boiling water

- 4 ounces butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 extra large egg

- 1⅓ cup all purpose flour, sifted
- 1 cup whole walnuts

➔ Put the dates, prunes, raisins, baking soda, and boiling water in a small bowl then stir together and set aside for no less than one hour, and up to 2 hours.

➔ Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350°F.

➔ Grease a 9x5-inch loaf pan and line base with buttered wax paper.

➔ In the bowl of a standing electric mixer, cream the butter, add the sugar, and beat for 2 minutes. Add the egg and vanilla and beat for 2 more minutes. Add the flour and slowly beat in.

➔ Remove the bowl from the mixer and tip in the fruit. Stir to combine well then fold in the walnuts.

➔ Pour into pan and bake for total of 50 minutes. If cake gets very dark, without removing pan from oven lay piece of foil over whole pan for final 20 minutes.

➔ Cut around the vertical sides of the pan when it comes out of the oven in case any of the fruit has stuck to the metal then leave to cool for 10 minutes. Turn the loaf out and reverse onto a rack to cool.

Apple Bran Muffins

MAKES 12-16 MUFFINS, DEPENDING ON PAN SIZE

These muffins are fantastic at any time of the year and are fragrant with apples and heady with the powerful twang of blackstrap molasses. You can actually bake them the night before and warm in a 300°F oven for ten minutes in the morning.

Dry ingredients

- 2 cups whole-wheat flour
- 1½ cups wheat bran (1 tablespoon reserved for tops)
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 1¼ teaspoons baking soda
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg, freshly grated



Wet ingredients

- ½ teaspoon orange zest, grated
- ⅓ cup orange juice
- 1⅓ cups buttermilk
- 1 extra large egg
- ½ cup blackstrap molasses
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Chunky ingredients

- 1 cup Golden Delicious apples, peeled, chopped in ½-inch pieces
- ½ cup dark raisins
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- 2 tablespoons walnuts, chopped, reserved for tops

➔ Position a rack in the middle and preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a muffin tin or line with papers and set aside.

➔ In a wide shallow bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients.

➔ In a deeper medium bowl, whisk together the wet ingredients.

➔ Pour the wet over the dry, quickly scatter on the chunky, and fold together lightly until just mixed. Fill the muffin cups equally and bake for 25 minutes or until a toothpick or skewer inserted into a muffin comes out clean.

Ginger Zucchini Bread

MAKES 2 LOAVES

Another wonderful loaf that just gets better with a day's rest. I would say it is foolproof, so if you have never baked before, give it a go. Though what you would be doing with two 8-inch loaf pans, I don't know!

- 4 large eggs
- 1⅔ cups sugar
- ⅔ cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 cups all-purpose flour or whole-wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 3 cups zucchini, unpeeled, grated
- ⅓ cup crystallized ginger, finely chopped
- 1¼ cups whole walnuts (optional)
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds (optional)

➔ Move oven rack so that the tops of the loaf pans will be in the center of the oven. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease bottoms of 2 (8x4-inch) loaf pans.

➔ In a bowl, whisk together eggs, sugar, oil, and vanilla, add zucchini and stir until well mixed, about 5 minutes.

➔ Stir in remaining ingredients, except sesame seeds.

➔ Evenly divide batter between two loaf pans.

➔ Scatter the optional sesame seeds on the top of the batter.

➔ Bake for 50-60 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

➔ Cool in the pans for 15 minutes then turn out onto a cake rack to cool completely.

Almond Loaf

MAKES ABOUT 12 SQUARES

This crunchy loaf makes a great breakfast bread with sweet butter and apricot jam or a delicious dessert with a scattering of sliced strawberries and a scoop of creamy Greek yogurt (or if you must, vanilla ice cream). It is so easy to make too. Just get all the dry ingredients together, then all the wet, and fold together.

Dry ingredients

- 1¼ cups blanched sliced almonds, toasted at 350°F for 15 minutes, divided
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

Wet ingredients

- 12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, melted
- 2 extra-large eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon pure almond extract
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

➔ Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease a 9x9-inch pan well and set aside.

➔ Throw ½ cup of the toasted almonds into the greased pan and tip the pan to coat the sides with the nuts.

➔ In a large bowl, sift together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, and toss in another ½ cup of the almonds.

➔ In a medium bowl, whisk together the butter, eggs, buttermilk, and the almond and vanilla extracts; then pour over the dry ingredients and fold together gently. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and scatter the last ¼ cup almonds around the edge. (If you put them in the middle they'll sink.)

➔ Bake for 35 minutes. Without removing cake from oven gently lay a piece of foil over the whole pan, the foil need not be crimped on the pan, simply laid upon it. Continue baking another 15-20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool completely in the pan before removing.

➔ Note: This cake is fragile in the oven, so don't slam the oven door once the cake has started to rise.

Pumpkin Bread

MAKES 12 MUFFINS

This simple "one bowl" type of bread is fun for children to help assemble, but I would never let them mix the wet and dry ingredients together. This incorporation must be done very quickly and lightly to result in a delicious, damp texture. There are 3 (three!) optional ingredients. I use them all, but I know some people prefer this bread with some or all of these options omitted.

Wet ingredients

- 1 (15 ounce) can pumpkin purée
- 4 extra-large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- ⅔ cup orange juice

Dry ingredients

- 3½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon ground nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 1 cup bittersweet Ghirardelli chocolate chips (optional)
- 1½ cup chopped walnuts (optional)
- ⅓ cup pumpkin seeds (optional)



GINGER ZUCCHINI BREAD



ALMOND LOAF

- Position a rack in the middle of oven and preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 13x9-inch pan and set aside.
- In a large bowl, beat the pumpkin, eggs, sugar, oil, and orange juice together until smooth.
- Sift together the flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, baking soda, and salt. Tip the flour mixture onto the wet ingredients then fold/stir together quickly and lightly until the flour is mostly incorporated. Add the (optional) chocolate chips and walnuts and with a few quick strokes fold them in. Stop mixing just as the flour is absorbed.
- Pour the batter into the prepared pan and scatter the (optional) pumpkin seeds evenly over the top.
- Bake for 50 minutes or until a skewer comes out clean. Cool in the pan for 20 minutes before turning out onto a cutting board then reverse onto a rack to cool completely.

Blueberry Biscuits

MAKES ABOUT 12 BISCUITS

Fresh, hot, and fragrant... could you ask for anything more? These are not very sweet (tagged by a friend as a “grown-up” biscuit), so they go well with the Orange Honey Butter or with plain old butter and Pepper Jack cheese. If you have no blueberries, use dark raisins.

- 1½ cups fine whole-wheat flour
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup sunflower seeds
- ¾ teaspoon sea salt
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ cup blueberries or ½ cup dark raisins
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- ½ cup golden olive oil
- 1 whisked egg white

- Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat oven to 450°F.
- Grease a cookie sheet and set aside.
- In a bowl, combine the flours, sunflower seeds, salt, 2 tablespoons of sugar, and the blueberries. Add the buttermilk and the oil and with a large spoon, fold together lightly just until a sticky dough forms. Leave in the bowl for a couple of minutes to firm up.
- Tip out onto a floured surface, divide into 12 pieces and roll each piece of dough lightly to form a disc. Brush with egg white and dust with the remaining sugar.

- Arrange the biscuits on the cookie sheet and bake for 15 minutes or until golden brown.
- Serve warm, with orange honey butter (recipe follows).

Orange Honey Butter

- 6 ounces sweet butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest

- Beat all the ingredients together and pile into a bowl. ■

PUMPKIN BREAD



NUTRITION

<p>EASTER CAKE: PER SERVING: CALORIES 333 (36 from fat); FAT 14g (sat. 6g); CHOL 40mg; SODIUM 168mg; CARB 52g; FIBER 3g; PROTEIN 4g</p>	<p>APPLE BRAN MUFFINS: PER SERVING: CALORIES 197 (19 from fat); FAT 4g (sat. 1g); CHOL 23mg; SODIUM 309mg; CARB 37g; FIBER 6g; PROTEIN 6g</p>	<p>GINGER ZUCCHINI BREAD: PER SERVING: CALORIES 194 (45 from fat); FAT 10g (sat. 2g); CHOL 30mg; SODIUM 237mg; CARB 24g; FIBER 1g; PROTEIN 2g</p>	<p>ALMOND LOAF: PER SERVING: CALORIES 398 (41 from fat); FAT 19g (sat. 8g); CHOL 72 mg; SODIUM 259mg; CARB 53g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 7g</p>	<p>PUMPKIN BREAD (W OPTIONAL INGRED.): PER SERVING: CALORIES 669 (48 from fat); FAT 37g (sat. 8g); CHOL 79mg; SODIUM 534mg; CARB 78g; FIBER 5g; PROTEIN 12g</p>	<p>BLUEBERRY BISCUITS: PER SERVING: CALORIES 229 (54 from fat); FAT 14g (sat. 2g); CHOL 1mg; SODIUM 259mg; CARB 22g; FIBER 3g; PROTEIN 6g</p>
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