



Our Products as featured in...



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Gadgets & Gear Cast-Iron Skillets

We recommend using a 10-inch cast-iron skillet for our **Southern-Style Skillet Corn Bread** (page 11). In a recent testing of several brands, we preferred the Lodge Logic series of cast-iron pans. This preseasoned, no-frills line performed very well in all of our cooking tests (scrambled eggs, pan-seared steaks with a pan sauce, shallow-fried chicken, and yes, corn bread) and was virtually nonstick from the first use.



TEST KITCHEN FAVORITE
The Lodge Logic is the best pan for corn bread.

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Our 11,000 Contest Winner!
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Southern-Style Skillet Corn Bread

Every skillet corn bread recipe I make turns out too tender, like a corn muffin, rather than crisp, like the corn bread I grew up on in Georgia. Any suggestions? —Poly Smith, Evansville, Ind.

As the lone Southern cook in a test kitchen full of New Englanders, I assumed the responsibility of introducing my coworkers to Southern-style corn bread. Unlike sweet and cakey Northern versions that are better suited to the dessert table, Southern corn bread contains neither sugar nor flour, making it savory enough to join the main course. I wanted to make a proper Southern corn bread with heavy corn flavor, a sturdy, moist crumb, and a dark brown crust that would win Northern allegiance.

Whereas Northern corn bread is cooked in a baking pan in a moderate oven, Southern skillet corn bread requires a little juggling—but the crisp crust is well worth the effort. The fat (oil, butter, bacon fat, or lard) is preheated in a cast-iron skillet and then combined with a mixture of cornmeal, buttermilk or milk, eggs, baking powder and baking soda, and salt. The batter is poured into the hot greased skillet and cooked in the oven until golden and crusty.

After whipping up a spread of existing recipes, I realized this wasn't going to be easy. One corn bread was flat as a pancake, another was drip-

ping in grease, and most were sorely lacking in flavor. Since corn flavor is absolutely essential to good Southern-style skillet corn bread, I figured I'd work through flavor issues first and fix the texture later.

I moved forward using the least offensive recipe of the lot, which was made with flavorful whole-grain stone-ground cornmeal. Subsequent testing, however, exposed the stone-ground cornmeal as too gritty, even when I tried grinding it down further in a food processor. I made my next batch with widely available and finely ground Quaker cornmeal. The texture of this corn bread was certainly better, but now the corn flavor was very mild—not really a surprise, since the germ is removed from this cornmeal during processing. Hoping that toasting would intensify its flavor, I spread the finely ground cornmeal on a baking sheet and threw it into the oven. I couldn't believe what a difference a mere five minutes of toasting had made: The corn bread now had big corn flavor, with minimal grit.

Increasing the buttermilk, which my tasters preferred to milk, added a sharp tang that worked well with the corn. When it came to fat selection, my tasters rejected bacon drippings, shortening, and lard, saying that each had a distinct flavor that took away from the corn; a combination of butter (for flavor) and vegetable oil (which can withstand high heat without burning) worked much better. The flavor was now on track, but the texture was too crumbly.

One corn bread recipe I'd seen made a cornmeal mush by softening raw cornmeal with boiling water to moisten the bread's texture. Using the same principle, I mixed the hot toasting cornmeal with the buttermilk. The cornmeal softened in just a few minutes; then I mixed the batter and put the skillet into the oven. Now *this* was the corn bread I remem-

bered—crisp, slightly moist, cohesive and not crumbly, and with bold corn flavor. But would it win over my coworkers? I sliced up fat wedges and listened with satisfaction as each taster grudgingly admitted that when it comes to corn bread, the South just might be onto something. —Colt Rich

SOUTHERN-STYLE SKILLET CORN BREAD

SERVES 12

While any 10-inch oversize skillet will work here, our first choice (for both tradition and function) is a cast-iron skillet. Avoid coarsely ground cornmeal, as it will make the corn bread gritty.

- 2 1/4 cups cornmeal
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs

1. Adjust oven racks to lower-middle and middle positions and heat oven to 450 degrees. Heat 10-inch oversize skillet on middle rack for 10 minutes. Bake cornmeal on rimmed baking sheet set on lower-middle rack until fragrant and color begins to deepen, about 5 minutes. Transfer hot cornmeal to large bowl and whisk in buttermilk; set aside.

2. Add oil to hot skillet and continue to bake until oil is just smoking, about 5 minutes. Remove skillet from oven and add butter, carefully swirling pan until butter is melted. Pour all but 1 tablespoon oil mixture into cornmeal mixture, leaving remaining fat in pan. Whisk baking powder, baking soda, salt, and eggs into cornmeal mixture.

3. Pour cornmeal mixture into hot skillet and bake until top begins to crack and sides are golden brown, 12 to 16 minutes. Let cool in pan 5 minutes, then turn out onto wire rack. Serve.

Secrets to SOUTHERN-STYLE CORN BREAD

Follow these steps to ensure bold corn flavor and the perfect texture, inside and out.



- 1.** Toasting the cornmeal gives the bread richer corn flavor.
- 2.** Combining the hot cornmeal and buttermilk softens the cornmeal, resulting in a tender, sturdy, slightly moist crumb.
- 3.** A greased and thoroughly heated pan creates a crisp crust.



Dry-toasting the cornmeal before mixing the batter maximizes the corn flavor in this savory bread.