

ingredients are blended. A few lumps or streaks of flour here and there and you know that you've done it correctly.

Bring in the Blueberries

OK. I had a great pancake recipe. But what about those berries? I found that the size of the berry really mattered. If possible, choose small, fresh, wild blueberries; they are much sweeter than their bigger blueberry cousins. I also found that if you can't find good blueberries in the produce section, you should head right for the frozen foods. One particular brand of frozen blueberries, Wyman's, tasted nearly as good as (and in some cases better than) the fresh berries, and by keeping a stash of frozen blueberries on hand, you're always ready to make these pancakes.

Now, how to avoid those mottled berry pancakes. Stirring the berries into the batter proved unsuccessful for two reasons. One, no matter how carefully I stirred, a few berries would invariably break and produce blue-gray pancakes. Two, extra stirring was a no-no; the more I stirred, the tougher the pancake. The best method was simply to ladle out some batter onto the hot skillet, then scatter a handful of berries on top.

And speaking of skillet, I wasted a couple of cups of batter using a regular skillet. No matter how well I oiled the pan (butter scorched every time), the pancakes would stick and the blueberries would rip open. Do yourself a favor and use a nonstick skillet.

So there they were. Fluffy, tender, flavorful, and very simple blueberry pancakes, without a broken berry in sight. Good enough to eat without maple syrup, you ask? Sure, but why on earth would you want to do that?

BLUEBERRY PANCAKES

MAKES ABOUT SIXTEEN 4-INCH PANCAKES, SERVING 4 TO 6

When fresh blueberries are not in season, frozen blueberries are a good alternative. To make sure that frozen berries do not bleed, rinse them under cool water in a mesh strainer until the water runs clear, then spread them on a paper towel-lined plate to dry. If you have buttermilk on hand, use 2 cups instead of the milk and lemon juice.

- 1 tablespoon juice from 1 lemon
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups (10 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries, preferably wild, rinsed and dried (see note)

EQUIPMENT TESTING: Griddles-a-Go-Go

With countertop real estate so valuable, I'm wary about buying "extra" appliances, such as an electric griddle. But after standing in front of what must have been my 40th batch of blueberry pancakes, I gave electric griddles a second thought. Many electric griddles have a bigger cooking surface than a large 12-inch skillet (which fit only three pancakes at a time comfortably). The possible payoff—less time cooking—was too good to resist.

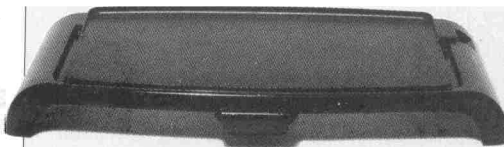
I bought the four largest models I could find. They were seemingly identical: All had an electric probe with an indicator light that turned off when the selected temperature was reached, all were fully immersible or dishwasher-safe (except for the electric probe control), all were made of cast aluminum with a nonstick coating, all had a hole or channel so that excess fat would drain into a removable grease tray. After heating each griddle to 350 degrees, I poured on the batter (each griddle fit eight pancakes at a time) and checked the pancakes for even browning. I also cooked bacon on each griddle.

The BroilKing Extra Large Griddle (\$49.99), which measured a whopping 21 inches by 12 inches and was the only griddle that could comfortably hold a full pound of bacon (16 strips), was the clear winner. Good thing that it also had one of the largest grease trays. Its only downfall was the excruciating 12½ minutes it took to heat up to 350 degrees. But this could be due to the thickness of the aluminum griddle. After it reached the proper temperature, there was very little temperature fluctuation. As a result, pancakes were evenly cooked every time.

The West Bend Cool Touch Electric Griddle (\$39.99) was the runner-up. The cooking surface measured 20½ inches by 10½ inches and could hold 12 strips of bacon. The West Bend heated up to 350 degrees in 6½ minutes and cooked pancakes very evenly. One minor drawback: The grease channel was slightly cumbersome to wash.

The remaining two models, the Rival Electric Griddle (\$29.99) and the Presto Cool Touch Electric Griddle (\$38.99), were the same size as the West Bend and both heated up to 350 degrees in 5½ minutes. However, the cooking surfaces on both models heated unevenly, and some pancakes were noticeably lighter in color than others. Also, some of the pancakes spread out very thin because of cool spots on the surface of the griddle.

Are electric griddles worth the counter space? If you find yourself making stacks of pancakes and pounds of bacon every weekend, you can't beat the speedy delivery they provide. —B.L.



BEST GRIDDLE

This BroilKing griddle took top honors, in part because it is so big. It also demonstrated even browning, without any of the cool spots that plagued two other models.

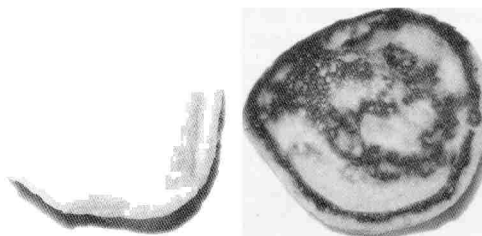


RUNNER-UP

The smaller West Bend griddle is a good second choice. It cooked pancakes evenly but could not hold as many strips of bacon as the winner.

1. Whisk lemon juice and milk in medium bowl or large measuring cup; set aside to thicken while preparing other ingredients. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in medium bowl to combine.

Is the Pan Ready?



NOT YET

TOO HOT

The only way to know when the pan is ready is to make a test pancake about the size of a half-dollar (use 1 tablespoon of batter). If after 1 minute the pancake is blond in color (left), the pan is not hot enough. If after 1 minute the pancake is golden brown, the pan is heated correctly. Speeding up the process by heating the pan at a higher temperature will result in a dark, unevenly cooked pancake (right).

2. Whisk egg and melted butter into milk until combined. Make well in center of dry ingredients in bowl; pour in milk mixture and whisk very gently until just combined (a few lumps should remain). Do not overmix.

3. Heat 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat for 3 to 5 minutes (see photos at left for tips on gauging when pan is properly heated); add 1 teaspoon oil and brush to coat skillet bottom evenly. Pour ¼ cup batter onto 3 spots on skillet; sprinkle 1 tablespoon blueberries over each pancake. Cook pancakes until large bubbles begin to appear, 1½ to 2 minutes. Using thin, wide spatula, flip pancakes and cook until golden brown on second side, 1 to 1½ minutes longer. Serve immediately, and repeat with remaining batter, using remaining vegetable oil only if necessary. (To keep pancakes warm while cooking remaining batter, see Kitchen Notes, page 31.)

LEMON-CORNMEAL BLUEBERRY PANCAKES

Follow recipe for Blueberry Pancakes, adding 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest to milk along with lemon juice and substituting 1½ cups stone-ground yellow cornmeal for 1 cup flour.