

# Southern biscuits

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This recipe flowchart is based on the “Phase III Biscuit” recipe in Alton Brown’s book “I’m Just Here for More Food: Food x Mixing + Heat = Baking” (2004, Stewart, Tabori & Chang 1st ed.). Makes about 20 biscuits. Note: lard, eggs, and buttermilk are replaced with substitutes in this recipe. If making a double batch, multiply the leavenings by 1.5 (not 2).

**Mixing method:** this recipe defines the biscuit method, in which flour is coated in fats before being exposed to any wet ingredients. Like wearing a raincoat, the oily coating on the flour proteins minimizes gluten formation, and it causes a tender and flaky texture because sheets of oil will form in between microscopic layers of gluten. The biscuit method is also used for pie crusts, shortcakes, and dumplings.

**Leavening:** yeast is not used because only a small amount of lift is desired, which can be controlled much more accurately with measuring small amounts of acids and bases (e.g., baking soda, baking powder, and buttermilk).

**Special equipment:** a cylindrical biscuit cutter works best, but any metal cookie cutter will work if its edges are straight and at least 1/2” high. Putting 1/2” rubber bands on the rolling pin will ensure a uniform biscuit height when the completed dough is rolled out.

**Special ingredients:** buttermilk is traditionally used, but a substitution is provided below.

All purpose flour is strongly suggested. High protein (“bread”) flour is not recommended because too much gluten will form, and then the biscuits will be hard (not tender). Low protein (“cake”) flour may not form enough gluten, which will cause the flaky layers to fall apart when the carbon dioxide is produced.

## Dry Ingredients

Set your oven to 450°F and move a rack to the middle of the oven.

Ingredients	Weight	Volume	whisk together → In a 2 quart bowl
All-purpose flour	270 g (9.5 oz)	2 cups	
Baking powder	14 g (0.5 oz)	4 teaspoons	
Baking soda	3 g (0.125 oz)	1/2 teaspoon	
Salt	6 g (0.25 oz)	1/4 teaspoon	

A food processor may optionally be used instead of a whisk to combine these ingredients more quickly. Also, it gets all of the lumps out of the flour. Using a whisk will also remove the lumps, albeit more slowly than sifting the flour or using a food processor.

Reduce salt to half if using salted butter.

## Integrate the fats

The goal of this step is to coat the flour with fats without completely removing all of the lumps of fat.

Ingredients	Weight	Volume
Butter	29 g (1 oz)	2 Tablespoons
Vegetable shortening	24 g (0.9 oz)	2 Tablespoons

Cut the butter into small chunks and drop it in separate pieces into the bowl (or food processor). Spoon the shortening into the same place.

If using your hands, work the butter and shortening into the dry ingredients (squeeze and grind the mixture between your thumb and fingers). Continue until there are no lumps of fat bigger than a small pea. Some of the flour should look pale yellow from being coated with butter.

If using a food processor, pulse the machine in 2-3 short bursts, then use a spatula to scrape the sides and bottom. Continue until the lumps of fat are nearly but not entirely gone. Move the mixture to a 1 quart bowl before proceeding to the next step.

## Get or make buttermilk

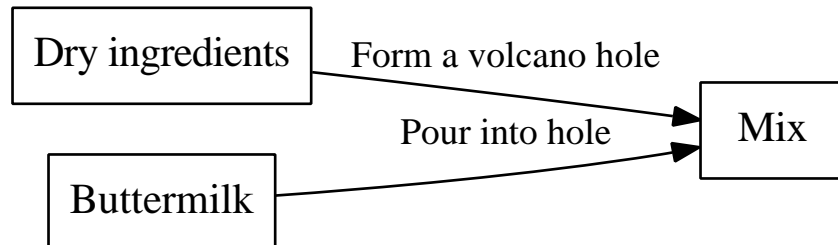
If buttermilk is available, use it as-is. The acidity of this liquid is important for giving the biscuits a characteristic “Southern” flavor. The baking soda added to the dry ingredients earlier should be sufficient to prevent this flavor from becoming too strong.

Ingredients	Weight	Volume
Buttermilk, chilled	227 g (8 oz)	1 cup
OR		
Milk, 1% or 2%	211 g (7.4 oz)	1 cup
Lemon juice	16 g (0.6 oz)	1 Tablespoon

If buttermilk is not available, create acidified artificial buttermilk by mixing milk and lemon juice and letting it sit at room temperature for at least 10 minutes or until milk solids form on a spoon used to stir it.

## Introduce the liquids

Gluten is formed in this step, and the completed dough is produced. A stand mixer is helpful but not required because working the dough manually requires a strong arm and patience.



In the 2 quart bowl, make a shallow, volcano-like hole in the dry ingredients and pour the buttermilk into it. Mix it all together using a large non-stick spatula, spoon, or stand mixer until all of the dry ingredients are thoroughly wet and integrated (at least 5 min on the stand mixer or 10 min manually).

The dough will be wet and sticky! Compare and contrast the texture of the dough to other mixing methods: it should not be very elastic, and it should have very small bubbles (if any at all). When pulled, it should tear apart easily (as opposed to making long strands).

## Form into biscuits and bake

Flour a large piece of wax paper and dump the dough on it. Apply a little more flour to the top of the dough. Fold the wax paper over the dough and use your hands or a rolling pin to roll it until it's between 1/2" and 1" thick (personal preference, depending on how tall you want your biscuits to be). Uncover the dough and cut it with a biscuit cutter into about 20 biscuits. When all the area is used up, remove the cut biscuits and roll the remaining dough back together using the wax paper to keep it from sticking to your hands. Roll it to the same height again and cut out more biscuits. The cuts allows the steam to go out the side of the biscuit when baking.

Put all the biscuits on a cookie sheet so that they are just barely touching. Bake at 450°F for 15 minutes or until the tops are golden brown. Check the bottom of a biscuit at 10 minutes and stop early if it's turning dark brown. Put the finished biscuits on a wire rack for 5 minutes to finish cooking internally and cool down.

Suggested condiments: butter, jam, syrup, or honey.