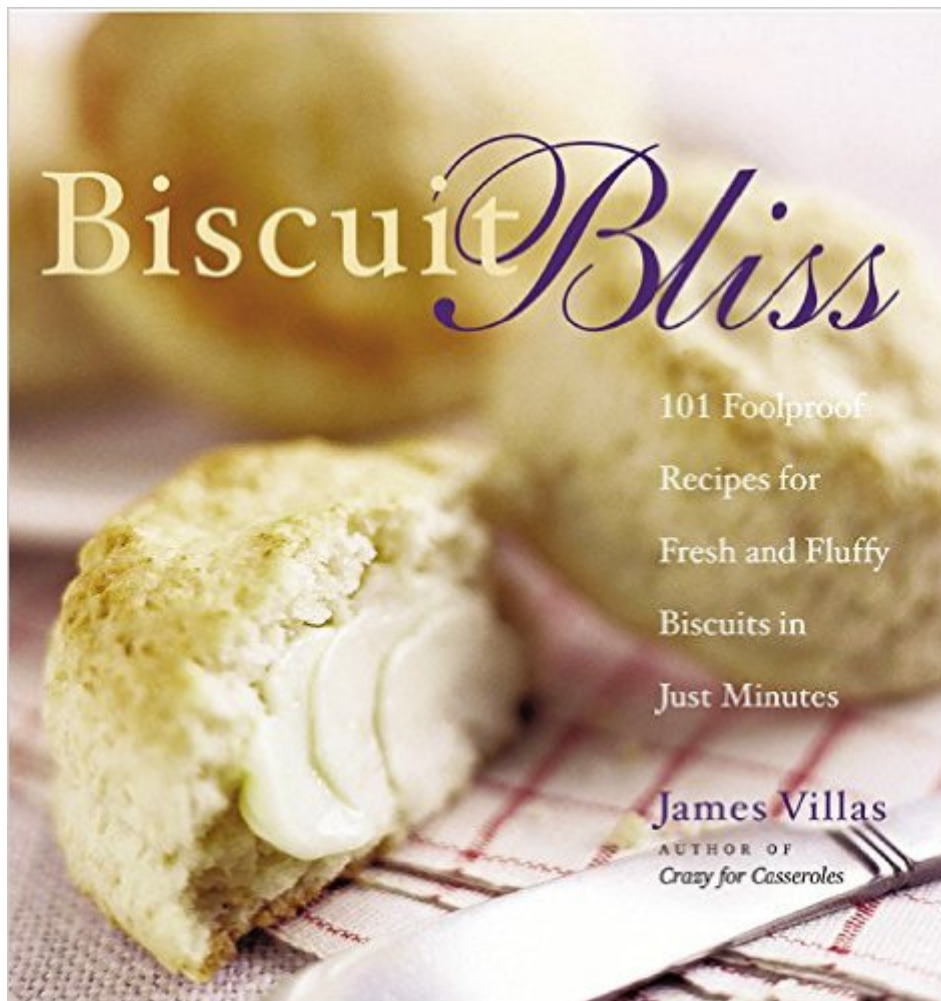


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Biscuit Bliss: 101 Foolproof Recipes For Fresh And Fluffy Biscuits In Just Minutes



Synopsis

101 foolproof recipes for fresh and fluffy biscuits.

Book Information

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: Harvard Common Press (December 13, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 155832223X

ISBN-13: 978-1558322233

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.5 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (44 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #534,558 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #168 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Main Courses & Side Dishes > Breakfast](#) #179 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Baking > Biscuits, Muffins & Scones](#) #439 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Baking > Bread](#)

Customer Reviews

James Villas is an old school culinary writer. He was a friend and confidant of both James Beard and Craig Claiborne. He was born and raised in North Carolina and many of his books have featured Southern cooking subjects and styles. This book is no exception. The book is an almost perfect follow-up to his last effort, 'Crazy About Casseroles' in that both books deal with a single subject which is at the core of both Southern and American cooking styles. I am especially fond of single subject cookbooks, whether the subject is a style of dish like gratins and casseroles or an ingredient like potatoes or eggs. Therefore, the score of this book starts with a score in my mind of four (4) stars instead of three (3) before I even read the first page. The book's subject can be divided into two major topics. The first topic is basic biscuit techniques, covering all the variations in flour, leavening, fat, oven temperature, and dough versus batter. The second topic deals with how to apply all those various techniques to sweet and savory additions. Techniques are covered in Chapters on 'Biscuit Basics', 'Plain Raised Biscuits', and 'Drop Biscuits'. The greatest virtue of basic biscuit technique is its simplicity. This does not mean a person can make good biscuits, much less make good biscuits on the first try, after reading a single recipe that gives no insight into biscuit subtleties. The first batch of biscuits I made a few years ago was from Jim Villas' mother's recipes he published in his memoir 'Between Bites'. I confess that the process had me puzzled, sticky, and

a bit disappointed, even though I am sure I followed the instructions to a tee. Part of the puzzle may be due to the fact that making biscuits is a lot more like making pastry than it is like making bread. While bread is vigorously kneaded to develop gluten and the starting mix of ingredients is often warm to accommodate the yeast or other organic starter, biscuits are worked with cold ingredients and low protein (soft) flour. The dough is worked hardly at all and is cut into disks while the fat is still in oatmeal flaked globs. Sounds like pastry to me. As I have had a fair amount of experience with various recipes from both Southern bakers and baking experts, I can say with confidence that Mr. Villas knows his stuff when it comes to biscuits. I thoroughly endorse his recommendation to use a brand of Southern soft flour such as White Lily. I only have two disappointments with the discussion of techniques. First, Villas describes a classic Southern method of biscuit making wherein the cook empties an entire 5 pound bag of flour into a bowl, adds wet ingredients, salt, and leavenings, and creates a ball of dough in a depression in the dough. Yet, Villas does not give us the recipe for this technique. He doesn't even explain why he doesn't give a recipe. I know there are still serious Southern cooks who use this technique, as I saw one demonstrate the technique on Martha Stewart's show about a year ago. The second disappointment is that he has no basic recipe where the only fat is butter. I have used such a recipe by Nick Malgieri with White Lily flour and buttermilk, and I find it as good or better than Villas' mother's recipe. Otherwise, I think the coverage of biscuit techniques is tiptop. Were I writing the same thing, I may have included a table comparing the recipes. This may facilitate one's personal experiments in the technique. I would also argue that basic biscuit technique is a better starting point for adolescent bakers than the drop biscuit technique. I don't think drop biscuit technique is easier and the basic technique is more versatile. The second main subject of the book is what you can do with biscuits and biscuit dough. This can be divided roughly into four areas: sweet additions, savory additions, scones, and biscuits as pastry. Appropriate to the title of this review, the range of variations possible in biscuits gives me the idea that a home entertainer can give all their books on French and Spanish and Italian and Greek 'little bites' recipes a rest and spend several months experimenting with hors d'ourves / antipasti / tapas / Mezes based on biscuits. As soon as I write this, I confess that even the lightest biscuits may be a bit heavy to stand alone among the martinis and margaritas, but I do suggest that you give the pizza and foccacia a rest and give these recipes a try. As biscuits, like chowder, are very close to being a true American invention, they are perfect as part of American cooking menus. While I am often surprised at how new many kitchen techniques such as baking powder are, I am also often surprised at how old some methods are. Many techniques such as cooking in a bag and using packaged dough as stew topping are touted as new ideas based on marketed products,

when actually the techniques are centuries old. Such is the case with using biscuits as a topping for pot pies and casseroles. Villas raises the veil from our eyes in revealing the historical sources for these old biscuit techniques. I liked this book a lot and I recommend it to anyone who wishes to master biscuits and who may find a gold mine of quick, relatively easy recipes with a big 'wow' factor. Highly recommended. Intermediate skill level.

I am a good cook. My one downfall, was biscuits. I am a true southerner, from Charlotte, NC. Not being able to make biscuits or dumplings with every meal is unacceptable. So, I bought this book to cure my failure as a biscuit maker. I couldn't make them light and fluffy. I bought this book. The first day I bought it, I made the sausage and cheese biscuits. It was a complete success. My boyfriend couldn't stop eating them. Then I made the oatmeal raisin biscuits. Also a complete success. Needless to say, I have made biscuits 4 times since I bought the book. I have turned into a biscuit making fool, and I haven't even had the book a week yet. If your skeptical, don't be. This book is GREAT. I am even able to adapt the recipes. I make frosting for my biscuits. I must warn you in advance- make a lot of biscuits, because if your feeding a family, they are gone quickly. All of James Villas, and especially his mothers' Martha Villas' books are winners to me. I reach for their books time and time again. When I travel, these books go with me. I have well over 300 cookbooks. This book is in my top 10. LOVE IT!!!!

Why would I go out to buy a whole book, even if it's a fairly small book, just on something so simple as how to make biscuits. Because I've never been happy with the biscuits that I've made. The ones made by my grandmother, let alone the ones made by the grandmother of a friend of mine, are so much better than the ones I've been able to make. I found though, that Mr. Villas has the same problem. In his case it was a great-aunt. She threw in a little of this, a little of that, put them in the oven, and then without even looking to see if they were ready, she'd take them out -- perfect biscuits. ==Instead, the rest of us have to follow recipes, try this, try that and finally come up with biscuits that at least begin to approach grandmothers. Here in this book is several pages of what you might call biscuit lore -- what kind of fat, yeast, flour (where do you get Southern flour made from soft winter wheat). Well you can order it through the mail, but you pay \$7 for shipping \$2 worth of flour -- that's OK, it's worth it, after all, that's the way you have to order good quality grits. I haven't tried all 101 'foolproof' recipes in the book. But I think that this mornings batch is the best I've made yet.

Whether you like your biscuits made with shortening, butter, lard (believe it or not, lard has less cholesterol than butter), or some combination of the above, you'll find plenty in here to suit you. There are even a few recipes that use whole-grain flours such as whole wheat. Many of the recipes include historical or personal notes that are fun to read and add interesting background to the process. Helpful hints include tips on freezing biscuits, as well as the all-important note for Northerners that finally saved my biscuit attempts when Alton shared it: if you use hard Northern flour, substitute cake flour for some of it. The book includes plain raised biscuits, flavored biscuits, drop biscuits, cocktail and tea biscuits, scones, and recipes that allow you to cook with biscuits. There are plenty of hearty recipes in here such as biscuits with bacon and cheese in them (one of my favorites). There are also more subtly-flavored choices such as the parmesan-herb drop biscuits and the sweet potato biscuits (which work surprisingly well with canned pumpkin). The scones are far better than any commercial scones I've had before--not too sweet, not too dry. Whether you want to go all-out with biscuits fried in lard on the top of the stove or make something out of buttermilk or whole grains; whether you prefer traditional favorites or unusual combinations such as parmesan and chutney--you'll find the perfect never-fail biscuit recipe in here. And that's definitely biscuit bliss!

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