

The only biscuit recipe you need

By **LIGAYA FIGUERAS**
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Biscuits are one of my guilty pleasures. I simply cannot pass up one of these heavenly, flaky, buttery rounds.

Not sure about you, but I've got a biscuit ritual: Snag one hot from the oven. Slice the already bursting seam with a knife. Add a pat of good butter to each half and watch it melt. Do you know how hard it is not to sneak a bite as you watch the butter stain the bread yellow? Dab on fruit preserves, decidedly choosing from among the gifted jars of the homemade variety, ones that friends felt I was worthy enough to receive. Coupled with a cup of coffee, a well-made, well-treated biscuit is a delicious start to a day.

I don't bake biscuits often because others make them far better than me. I've been treated to fresh biscuits from Chadwick Boyd, a food and lifestyle personality, part-time Atlanta resident and biscuit aficionado who is a key figure in the annual International Biscuit Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee. He makes moist, poufy biscuits look like a cake walk while I walk the road toward dry and crumbly.

Not that I haven't tried to improve. A few years ago, I worked the line at Bojangles'. That fast-food chain has got biscuit-making down to a science — in 48 steps. That's at least 45 steps too many for me.

Plus, why compete with perfection? Because I've since gotten ahold of a keeper of a biscuit recipe. It calls for just two ingredients: White Lily self-rising flour and heavy cream. Perhaps you know of it. It's called Jolene Black's Cream Biscuits. Originally published in the Times-Picayune in April 2005, it is a reader recipe. It has since been reprinted in "Cooking Up a Storm — 10th Anniversary: Recipes Lost and Found From the Times-Picayune of New Orleans."

As the Times-Picayune editors note, success comes from sticking with these two ingredients. "The trick is to use these exact ingredients. The biscuits won't be as light if you use any other kind of self-rising flour. The fat in the heavy cream replaces the shortening or butter in comparable recipes."

The first time I made these biscuits, I probably should have recorded my oohs and aahs. I was alone in my kitchen, talking to no one about my wonderment and delight at the divine smell, the sky-high rise of the bread, and the brevity of the baking project — it's not a project; start to finish, making these biscuits is faster than washing dishes by hand. I marveled at the perfection of the liquid-to-dry ratio. And that we don't even need to add salt.

An apple a day might keep the doctor away. A cream biscuit a day surely is a recipe for tasting heaven on earth.

JOLENE BLACK'S CREAM BISCUITS

2 1/2 cups White Lily self-rising flour
1 1/2 cups heavy cream

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Lightly grease a baking sheet.

Put the flour in a medium mixing bowl and add the cream. Stir until a soft, sticky ball forms. (The dough will seem wet at first.) On a very lightly floured surface, knead lightly with your well-floured hands about 3 times, just until the dough comes together.

Pat the dough to about 1/2-inch thickness. Cut out biscuits with a 2 1/2-inch round cutter. Bake on the prepared baking sheet for 10 to 12 minutes, until the biscuits are golden brown. Makes 10-12 biscuits.

Nutritional information

Per biscuit, based on 10: 234 calories (percent of calories from fat, 52), 4 g protein, 24 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 14 g fat (8 g saturated), 49 mg cholesterol, 410 mg sodium.

— From "Cooking Up a Storm — 10th Anniversary: Recipes Lost and Found from the Times-Picayune of New Orleans," edited by Judy Walker and Marcelle Biennu, published by Chronicle Books. Published with permission.



Bethany Jean Clement/The Seattle Times-TNS

Don't wait for a popup or until somebody opens a nostalgia-driven French bread pizzeria — make your own, maybe even better than you remember, with bubbly cheese and blackened edges from a few extra minutes under the broiler.

Comfort-food favorite FRENCH BREAD PIZZA is back

By **BETHANY JEAN CLEMENT**
The Seattle Times

SEATTLE — Mention French bread pizza, and people have feelings. The reason is right there on the Stouffer's French Bread Pizza box, below the cozy logo of the name inside the outline of a pot: "Celebrating 40 Years," it says in a cursive flourish, and, elsewhere, "Back to the Taste You Love," with "Love" inside the shape of a heart. (Somewhat unnervingly, the box also feels the need to specify, "Made with 100% real cheese" and that the pepperoni contains "pork, chicken & beef." Chicken seems weird for pepperoni-making, but then chicken is cheap, and so is Stouffer's French Bread Pizza — a box of two for \$3.99.)

French bread pizza is a classic American come-home-from-school-and-eat-it-in-front-of-the-TV snack — Stouffer's if you were lucky, but also easy enough for you to make yourself (sometimes, sigh, substituting English muffins). Hot gooeyness atop a pleasingly shaped, light-and-crispy bread-torpedo — many happy latchkey moments were made of this; just add a glass of cold milk and some reruns.

Even Seattle's best pizza professionals — masters of cold-fermented, hand-tossed, beautifully browned-and-bubbled actual pizza crust — profess love of French bread pizza. When I messaged Tom Siegel of The Independent Pizzeria, he sent back a laughing-until-crying cat emoji and said, "I grew up on what I thought were delicious at the time: Stouffer's French bread pizzas! I think I remember loving the pepperoni."

Brandon Pettit of Delancey and Dino's grew up eating a New Jersey version that a friend's mom made: "a can of tomatoes blended up with a couple heads of garlic and olive oil spread on French bread then topped with tons of parm" — not the classic, but sounds extremely solid.

Marie Rutherford — the poetess pizzaiola of erstwhile Moon Pizza (her Instagram captions achieve lyrical apex) — waxed reminiscent about "all things memory-inducing ... comforting, familiar, homey, snug ... buildings of fat, sauce, cheese."

Rutherford also went to the French-bread-pizza pop-up put on recently by the combo of Ben's Bread (coming to Phinney Ridge this fall) and Post Alley Pizza (in, yes, Post Alley for a long time now), hosted on a warm and breezy summer evening at The London Plane. She was

by no means alone — only a few minutes after the party started, a line of 25 sense-memory supplicants stretched down the sidewalk (and that's not counting babies). Rutherford loved the French bread pizza she got there: "crunchy, soft ... warm, it smelled so good and it was [expletive] delicious. I could have eaten a few more."

The good news is that nobody has to wait for another one-night-only event (or until somebody opens a French bread pizzeria?), and we definitely don't have to resort to Stouffer's (I'm afraid to try the one in my freezer, as there's just no possible way it can live up to its nostalgia quotient). A huge part of the appeal of French bread pizza is that it's so easy and fast, any impatient latchkey kid or stoned grown-up can make their own. And with just a little extra care, this recipe for French bread pizza will live up to — or even best — any TV-watching childhood memories.

AS GOOD AS YOU REMEMBER FRENCH BREAD PIZZA (AKA F.B.P.)

The method of buttering and toasting the bread to crisp it a bit before saucing/topping is pretty much ubiquitous on the internet, but rather than bothering to melt the butter and brush it on, you can just spread it gently if it's at room temperature. The amounts here have been left open-ended — if you make extra to freeze (see note), your future binge-watching self will thank you very much. — Bethany Jean Clement

French bread (fancy or cheap, up to you, but lighter/airier is better)
Butter (room temperature)
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper
Pizza sauce (extra credit if you make your own — see recipe)

Pizza toppings of your choice (pepperoni is the Stouffer's classic)

Shredded whole-milk mozzarella (plus a little fresh mozzarella and/or cheddar if you like)
Grated Parmesan (Reggiano or other good quality)

1. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees with the rack in the middle to upper-middle part.

2. Split your bread lengthwise with a good serrated knife, place on a baking sheet cut-side up, spread with butter, and sprinkle lightly with kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper.

3. Bake about 8 minutes, until the top of the buttered bread has a little crispness to it. Remove

from oven and let cool for a few minutes.

4. OK, you know how to do this! Assemble your F.B.P.s with sauce, one layer of toppings thin enough to absorb cheese-heat and plenty of cheese. (Things to keep in mind: You don't want to ensoggen [technical term] your bread with sauce, but you do want a nice saucy amount — trust your instinct, and you will find your happy sauce-path. Some say to lay a few toppings down before the sauce for protection of bread-integrity, but that seems like overkill to me, as does, I would like to acknowledge, this entire parenthetical section — onward!)

5. Bake for another 8-10 minutes or until cheese is melty and bubbling. Then, for more molten cheese/blackened bread-edges, throw on the broiler for a minute or three. (But monitor carefully to prevent wholesale burning!)

6. Park yourself in front of TV and enjoy.

Note: To freeze French bread pizzas for later: Stick unbaked F.B.P.s in the freezer for a couple of hours until completely frozen. Put them in Tupperware/reused plastic takeout containers, then back into the freezer they go. To bake from frozen, preheat oven to 400 degrees, put F.B.P.(s) on a baking sheet, and bake for about 15 minutes until cheese is melty and bubbling; then, for more molten cheese/blackened bread-edges, follow the same process as noted above.

PRETTY QUICK PIZZA SAUCE

Don't be afraid of the sugar. Stouffer's sure isn't — it is their sauce's third ingredient, just after water and tomato paste.

— Bethany Jean Clement

1 28-ounce can of whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes
1 garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon red wine or sherry vinegar
A few fresh bay leaves or 1 dry leaf

1. Stir all of it together in a medium saucepan and bring to a bubble over medium-high heat. Turn heat down to medium, rough-chop the tomatoes with your spoon, then reduce until sauce is somewhat thickened, about 25 minutes, stirring occasionally.

2. Fish out bay leaves, then blend sauce with a hand blender or in a regular blender until pizza-sauce smoothness is attained.

3. Add more sugar and/or vinegar to taste; it might need up to a teaspoon more sugar for a slight sweetness and up to a tablespoon of vinegar for brightening, depending on the flavor of your canned tomatoes. Let cool a bit before using; store extra in a jar in fridge and use within about a week (make more F.B.P.s with it!).