

Culinary Historians of Canada

Inspiring appreciation of Canada's food history

DERBY, OR SHORT CAKES

The Cook Not Mad; Or, Rational Cookery, James MacFarlane: Kingston, Upper Canada, 1831, page 52, number 165 [reprinted by The Cherry Tree Press, Toronto, 1972 and 1982].

Text of Original Recipe

Rub one pound of butter into two pounds of sifted flour, put one pound of currants, one pound of sugar, mix all together with half a pint of milk, one egg, two tea spoonfuls of pearlash, roll it out thin, cut it in round cakes and bake them.

CHC's Modern Instructions

This recipe halves easily (but use the entire egg) and the raw dough freezes well. However, the cakes need to be eaten fresh since they turn stale within a few hours of baking. The recipe yields about 4 dozen cakes at 2" (5cm) wide.

1 cup (250mL) milk
1 egg
2 cups (500mL) soft butter
8 cups (2mL) all-purpose flour, sifted
2 cups (500mL) currants, plumped briefly in hot water if they are dry
2 cups (500mL) white or brown sugar
2 tsps (10mL) pearlash, dissolved in 10 mL (2 tsps) milk **OR** 2 tsps (10mL) baking soda

Heat the oven to 350°F (180°C).

In a small bowl, whisk the egg and milk together, then set aside. In a large bowl, using your fingertips rub the butter and flour together. Since your hands are already in there, use them to stir in the currants, the sugar and the pearlash or baking soda. Make a well in the centre.

Pour the reserved liquid into the well. Blend the dry ingredients into it so a ball of dough forms.

Sprinkle some flour on a board. Tip the dough onto the floured board and roll it around to remove the surface stickiness. Sprinkle more flour on the board. With a floured rolling pin, roll out the dough to about ½" (1.5cm) thickness. Cut into circles.

Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, turning once. Both surfaces should be nicely golden. Eat within a few hours. Great on their own or with jam!