

MONTGOMERY'S INN
RECIPE FROM THE HISTORIC KITCHEN

DERBY, OR SHORTCAKES

ORIGINAL RECEIPT

The Cook Not Mad; or Rational Cookery, Kingston, U.C.: Published by James Macfarlane, 1831, page 52, No. 165; Canadian edition of an American work, first published in 1830, in Watertown, New York, 35 miles southeast of Kingston.

“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.”

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Derby (pronounced *darby*) is a small town in the North Midlands of England. **Derby Cakes** are one of many examples of regional griddle cakes found throughout the British Isles. Since the Middle Ages, bakers have used the term **short** to mean a dough with a high ratio of fat (butter, lard, drippings) to flour so that the resulting baked cakes are crumbly and tender, i.e., “short.”

Pearlash (refined potash, or potassium carbonate) was an early chemical leavening agent. It is still available in some delicatessens specializing in German foods because the Germans still use it extensively. It needs to be dissolved in milk or water; otherwise, it is not distributed through the dough well. In North America, baking soda took the place of pearlash in the mid-1800s. Wherever old recipes call for pearlash, you may substitute baking soda.

The Cook Not Mad was the first English-language cookbook published in Canada; it was an edition of an American book, written just across the border from Kingston, in Watertown, New York. The first cookbook compiled in Canada was *The Frugal Housewife's Manual* by A.B. of Grimsby, printed in Toronto in 1840.

Derby, or Short Cakes continued

OUR MODERN EQUIVALENT

Our modern equivalent follows the original as closely as possible, and the yield of cakes is large; however, the recipe is easily halved. You may also freeze the raw cakes, and bake later from frozen.

500 mL	soft butter	2 cups
2 L	all purpose flour	8 cups
500 mL	currants	2 cups
500 mL	white sugar	2 cups
10 mL	baking soda	2 tsps
250 mL	milk	1 cup
1	egg	1

Rub: butter into the flour, using your fingers, until it resembles soft bread crumbs

Add: currants, sugar, and baking soda

Whisk: milk and egg together

Pour: the milk-and-egg mixture into the flour mixture

Blend: using a spoon, then your hands, until you can form a ball; if needed, add more milk, depending on the flour's absorbency

Roll out: on a well-floured surface, about 1 cm (3/8 inch) thick, and cut into circles

Bake: in a moderate oven, at 180°C (350°F), on an ungreased cookie sheet for 15 to 20 minutes, turning once; alternatively, cook in a cast-iron frying pan on top of the stove

Yield: about 4 dozen 5-cm (2-inch) cakes

