

MONTGOMERY'S INN  
RECIPE FROM THE HISTORIC KITCHEN

**FARMERS' SPONGE CAKE**

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**ORIGINAL RECEIPT**

Catharine Parr Traill, *The Canadian Settler's Guide*, New Canadian Library No. 64, McClelland and Stewart, 1964, pages 102-3, first published as *The Female Emigrant's Guide*, 1854 [1855]

“One teaspoonful of carbonate of soda dissolved in a tea-cupful of sweet milk, two tea-spoonfuls of cream of tartar, mixed dry into the flour, one egg, one cup of soft sugar, one cup of butter melted: it can be made richer by the addition of a cup of currants, or spice to flavour it. Mix to a thickish batter, and pour into a flat pan; or bake in tins.”

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**HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

The recipe is called a farmers' cake because it is easy to make and was a common and tasty form of cake eaten in country farmhouses at the time Mrs Traill wrote her book for British emigrants to Canada. The recipe was also easy to remember, without a written record: a cup each of the main ingredients, plus one egg, then flour to make a thickish batter.

**Carbonate of soda** refers to baking soda, introduced to the Canadian market in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, about the time Traill's book was first published. It replaced earlier raising agents such as pearlash and saleratus, which sometimes left a bitter taste.

**Soft sugar** refers to brown sugar, as opposed to refined white sugar, which at the time came in solid cones and required pulverizing before use. Brown sugars varied widely in quality, some being considerably less pure than others, unlike the standardized grades of sugar sold today.

### OUR MODERN EQUIVALENT

Mrs Traill first specifies the simplest mixture for the batter, then comments that currants and spice make it richer. Her recipe gives only the briefest instructions. In our modern equivalent, we mix together the dry ingredients, then add the liquids.

500 mL	all-purpose flour	2 cups
10 mL	cream of tartar	2 tsp
5 mL	baking soda	1 tsp
5 mL	nutmeg	1 tsp
250 mL	brown sugar	1 cup
250 mL	currants	1 cup
1	egg	1
250 mL	milk	1 cup
250 mL	melted butter	1 cup

Combine: the flour, cream of tartar, baking soda, nutmeg, brown sugar, and currants

Beat: the egg slightly, then mix it into the milk

Add: the egg-milk mixture and the melted butter to the dry ingredients

Bake: the batter in a 20-cm square (8-inch square) buttered pan, in an oven preheated to 175°C (350°F), for about 45 minutes

