

RECIPE FROM THE HISTORIC KITCHEN

CHEESE STRAWS

ORIGINAL RECEIPT

The New Cook Book, A Volume of Tried, Tested and Proven Recipes, by The Ladies of Toronto and Other Cities and Towns, revised, Grace E. Denison, ed, (Toronto: E. W. Gillett Co., Ltd., 1906), pp 242-43.

"Mix three ounces of flour with four ounces of grated cheese (Parmesan is the best), add one-half a tablespoon of salt, dash of cayenne, and one-quarter pound of butter. Work this to a smooth paste sufficiently stiff to roll; add a very little water, if necessary. Roll out in very thin strips and cut into straws, place on a greased tin and bake ten minutes in a moderate oven. They must be straw colour and very crisp."

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Cheese straws were immensely popular savouries for an afternoon tea or an elegant hors d'oeuvre course before dinner. In *The Boston Cooking School Cook Book*, 1896, Fannie Farmer recommended that "cheese straws be piled log cabin fashion and [be] served with [the] cheese or salad course."

This recipe is taken verbatim from *Cassell's Dictionary of Cookery* (London: 1877, p 119). One of the ladies who submitted it for inclusion in *The New Cook Book* must have thought them good enough for republishing, and it's repeated in *The Canadian Family Cook Book*, also edited by Grace Denison in 1914. Essentially, these particular cheese straws are parmesan-flavoured shortbread; a portion of the flour is replaced by a similar portion of a dry grated cheese. Other recipes called for very fine bread crumbs, and yet others are of leftover strips of puff pastry sprinkled with the grated cheese. True **Parmesan cheese** (from the Italian *parmigiano*) is a very hard skim-milk cheese from Parma, a city and territory in northern Italy.

The *New Cook Book* was a compilation of donated receipts from women across Canada. Editor Grace Denison wrote for *Saturday Night* magazine as "Lady Gay".

OUR MODERN EQUIVALENT

Be careful when adding salt, because a good Parmesan cheese is naturally salty. We find a tablespoon way too much, but a quarter teaspoon can be beneficial. Taste the raw dough before rolling it out to decide for yourself. The baked straws aren't as delicate as the raw dough would suggest. This recipe doubles easily. If you want to follow the presentation in the 1911 photo on the other side, cut out some rings about 3.5 cm (1½") in diameter first, then continue with the cutting out of the straws.

175	mL	white all purpose flour	¾	cup
325	mL	freshly grated parmesan cheese,	1 1/3	cups
		gently packed		

.5	mL	cayenne	1/8	tsp
125	mL	soft unsalted butter	1/2	cup
to taste		salt		to taste

- Combine: flour, grated cheese and cayenne
- Rub: butter into dry ingredients to form a firm but tender ball of dough
- Roll: out on a well-floured surface 1 cm (1/2") thick
- Cut: into thin strips about 1 cm (1/2") wide using a very sharp knife, pastry wheel or pizza cutter
- Divide: into straws of about 12 cm (4 1/2") long
- Reroll: leftover bits of dough and cut them out
- Transfer: to a very lightly greased baking sheet
- Bake: at 190°C (375°F) for 10 minutes or until "straw colour and very crisp"
- Yield: approximately 24 straws

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