



Shaping the knowledge and skills of the artisan
baking community through education since 1993

Try This At Home Series

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Southern Accent

Mitch Stamm & Kristen Lopez

Mitch: “We’re here for you.” “We’re in this together.” Don’t know what the future holds? Make a large purchase now because we are here for you. My inbox is rife with emails beginning with, “the dark, challenging, unprecedented times...” And, those are from friends and colleagues. I don’t need to be reminded about the “new normal.” At least not dozens of times per day. Every day.

Now, everyone is going to know my safeword: “BISCUITS!” Sometimes, I just want to go home.

My bio says that I grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, the same town that gave the world Octavia Spencer. My friends maintain that I didn’t really grow up there. I just got taller. I moved from the South five decades ago, but never really left. I’m not going to lie, at least not about this: Succotash is not a side dish; it’s a meal. Cornbread is breakfast, lunch, dinner and/or dessert. Boiled peanuts? A major food group. Iced tea? So sweet it can be used for pancakes. Bob Wills said it best. Don’t you dare not listen: [That's What I Like 'Bout The South](#)

I've always been challenged, curious, and haunted by biscuits & gravy. Oh, I appreciate its origins and cultural and sociological relevance. I find the current fascination puzzling. I'm waiting for the biscuits, gravy, and lobster moment - it happened with macaroni & cheese. And grits. My first encounter with B&G was around 3:00 one morning at Merle's, a 24-hour diner. Sitting at the counter, we were served by the cook. The gravy was so thick, it was served a knife. I didn't know whether to slice it or stab it. The cook looked like he may have stabbed a few people or things. The biscuit slid on the plate; the gravy wobbled. I swear there was more flour in the gravy than in the biscuit. I did not know which to butter, the biscuit or the gravy. Fortunately, I had enough 'butter' for both.

Imagine my incredulity when I woke up and *le biscuit* had become *en vogue*. I didn't need to ask if people were plying *leur métier* on biscuit trucks. Yeah, they are there, parked among trucks offering avocado toast, waffles, and poutine. Of course, a fried egg on top is *de rigueur*. Apparently, abraded jeans and one headphone are required to properly engage.

All, or at least most, cynicism aside, I love biscuits. All types: soft, flaky, crumbly, fluffy, chubby, stubby, spicy, gritty, hearty, hardy, dropped, scooped, spooned, cut, round, square, sweet, savory, pimento cheese, et al. Well, maybe not pimento cheese. To paraphrase Peter Reinhart, there are two kinds of biscuits: Good & Great.

Biscuits are a good entry point for baking leavened goods. Anyone can experience success the first time they bake them. And, with practice they can easily continue refining and improving their results.



Counting layers? Top this!

At the International Baking & Pastry Institute at Johnson & Wales University - ahem - I advocate for professionalism, the use of the Oxford comma, and flaky biscuits. We provide a recipe for baking powder biscuits because the objectives and assessments are clearly defined. In addition to flavor, tenderness, structure, shape, uniformity, color, and evenness of bake, the number of layers provides insight to the students' hand skills and ability to follow directions. The degree of difficulty in making a flaky biscuit is greater than it is for scooped and/or dropped biscuits. Unlike the subjective criteria, the number of layers is not debatable.

I'm eager to see Kristen's perspective. She's had good mentors (Hi Craig) and good training since she graduated.

Until we bake again,
Mitch

Kristen: When I think of biscuits, I think of Mitch Stamm. Sure, I'd made biscuits before going to Johnson & Wales University and yes, I did enjoy the occasional vacation to the Carolinas' beaches where I'd get a small taste of a southern lifestyle a few weeks a year. But I never knew anyone as Southern. His campus Starbucks order was always iced tea accompanied by several sweet & lo packets because they couldn't make it sweet enough. And you know the plastic case he keeps lames in? Crystal Light containers. And he will always open the door for you.

Mitch's passion and curiosity for bread baking captivates his students. When my class got to biscuits, his demeanor changed. He didn't just eat biscuits, he teathed on them. Something was very specific in the way we were taught and coached through it. More precise technique and perhaps even self-imposed pressure to create a room full of perfect biscuit makers. He is after all from a town where the minor league baseball team is called the Montgomery Biscuits (yes I still wear the t-shirt).

Mitch: So that's where the tee shirt went. At least I still have the hoodie.

He showed us how to "rework" the scraps of dough. No remixing, no folding. Nope. Absolutely not. Just gently push the scraps back together and punch out more rounds. These are not the most beautiful biscuits. However, they were craggy, crunchy and soft on the inside, kind of like our instructor. I still haven't found a better way to utilize the scrap and trimmings.



I never knew that a biscuit could be so beautiful and complex. That it could tell a story. His eyes gleamed as he jumped from group to group. I remember when my team's biscuits were being graded. This involved a lot of sizing up, some counting, some tearing and watching the layers fall away. And as I recall a very "summer of

love” comment about staring into the abyss of a biscuit. With ten more years of personal context, I realize that biscuits are in his DNA.

Mitch: Some students on campus make their presence known; some, like Kristen make their presence felt and meaningful.

My home bake is 50% whole wheat pastry flour because these days I make nearly everything with at least some whole grain (Hi Craig!). I always make my biscuits by hand at home, just like my pie crust. There is something about playing in the sandbox of flour and butter that soothes me. Whether you pair your biscuits with gravy (mine was a simple black pepper gravy) or butter and jam (mixed citrus marmalade, to be specific), there’s no place like `Bama.

And yes, I still shrug off the stress of the world with “Sweet Home Alabama” blaring.

Piece, love, bread,
Kristen

Tips for biscuit enjoyment:

- Play or stream “Sweet Home Alabama” at maximum volume.
- Pop the top of a 12-ounce, bottled Coca-Cola.
- Take two sips to make room for Step 4.
- Pour the contents of a 1.75-ounce package of salted peanuts into the bottle.
- Take one sip. Wait two minutes.
- Eat the biscuit alternating bites with sips of peanut float ensuring that there is at least one sip with a few peanuts left to wash the everything down and cleanse the palate.

Credits:

- Sausage Gravy; Recipe from Adam Joseph, former Director of Culinary Events, Johnson & Wales University, Providence, RI
- Merle’s: It was somewhere between Montgomery and Troy. It could have provided the set, characters, and inspiration for “Deliverance.” Doritos were offered as a breath freshener.

Notes:

- Store biscuit scraps/trimmings in the freezer. Use them to top cobblers, pot pies, etc. or brush them with melted butter and toss in plain or spiced sugar for monkey bread.
- Freeze raw biscuits. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight.
- In December 1973, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys reunited for two days to record “For the Last Time,” a compilation of standards and

hits. Mr. Wills suffered a stroke at the end of the first day's recording. The album was finished without him. He never recorded again.

BAKING POWDER BISCUITS

Total weight 2.576 kg

TOTAL FORMULA		
	%	Kilograms
All purpose flour	100.00	1.198
Baking powder	6.00	0.072
Sugar	5.00	0.060
Salt	2.00	0.024
Unsalted butter	35.00	0.419
Milk	67.00	0.803
Total	215.00	2.576

PROCESS - BAKING POWDER BISCUITS

- By hand, or machine, combine and blend the dry ingredients.
- Add the cold, cubed butter. Mix until the butter pieces are the size of hazelnuts.

- Add all the milk at once.
- When flour/ butter mixture and milk are barely combined fold the dough in half.
- Rotate the mass 90 degrees. Fold in half.
- Repeat the folding 6 more times for a total of 8 folds.
- Pat or roll the dough to the desired thickness, remembering they will rise vertically rather than spread.
- Use a knife to cut into squares or use a ring cutter dipped in flour for each biscuit to cut rounds.
- Wait at least 30 minutes before baking. Biscuits may be refrigerated overnight or frozen.
- Bake at 375°F convection oven until golden brown. Time will vary with the biscuit's size.

SAUSAGE GRAVY		
Total weight		2.514 kg
TOTAL FORMULA		
	%	Kilograms
Sausage	100.00	1.138
Onion	32.00	0.364
Milk	82.00	0.933
All purpose flour	5.00	0.057
Canola oil	2.00	0.023
Salt*		
Black peppert†		
Total	221.00	2.514

*As needed

†As needed

PROCESS - SAUSAGE GRAVY

- Remove casings from the sausage.
- Cook the sausage in a large skillet until golden brown and put into a bowl on the side.
- Pour off excess fat from the skillet and cook onions in it, until clear and translucent, 3 to 5 minutes.
- Add flour and stir to combine and coat. Cook as a roux.
- Add milk and season with salt and pepper.
- Return sausage to milk mixture and bring to a light boil.
- Reduce the heat to a simmer and let cook until thick, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes.
- Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper.

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