

Vanilla Fruit Scones

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Baking time: 12 minutes

Makes 10

A perfectly fluffy scone is a simple pleasure: quick and thrifty to make, but so delicious, especially when served just warm with cream or butter and a good dollop of jam or lemon curd. The most important thing to remember is not to knead the dough, which will quickly make your scones heavy.

- 3¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ stick plus 3 tbsp (¼ cup plus 3 tbsp) cold butter
- ¼ cup plus 1 tbsp sugar
- ½ cup golden raisins or your choice of dried fruit (optional)
- 1 cup less 1 tbsp milk
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 egg



1 Preheat the oven to 425°F. Put a large baking sheet in the oven to heat up. Mix the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, then sift into a large bowl. Cut the butter into cubes and add it to the bowl.

2 Rub the cold butter into the flour using your fingertips, until it looks like breadcrumbs. If you have a food processor, simply process the butter into the dry ingredients instead, then pour into a large bowl.

COLD BUTTER
Fluffy, flaky scones need to be made with really cold butter. If it's a hot day and the butter begins to feel greasy as you rub it in, pop the bowl in the fridge for 10 minutes before continuing.

3 Stir in the sugar, and the dried fruit if you're using it. I've made this a separate step because I've forgotten to add the sugar so many times when making scones, and I'm determined that you won't do the same!

4 Heat the milk in a small pan (or in the microwave for a few seconds) until warm, then add the lemon juice and vanilla. Let sit for a few minutes until it turns a little bit lumpy. Beat the egg, then add 2 tablespoons of it to the lumpy milk mixture. Set the rest of the egg aside.

MILK OR BUTTERMILK?
Souring the milk lightens the dough by activating the baking soda and boosting the rise. You can add ¾ cup of buttermilk or yogurt instead, and loosen with ¼ cup milk. Omit the lemon juice, but don't forget to add the egg.

5
Pour the soured milk evenly over the dry ingredients, working it into the flour with a table knife. Keep mixing until all the liquid is incorporated and you have a soft, rough dough. Don't worry if you miss a few crumbs at the bottom of the bowl; it's best not to overmix it.



6
Flour your hands and the work surface thoroughly. Turn the dough out onto it and sprinkle a little flour on top. Fold the dough over itself a couple of times just to smooth it a little (it's essential not to overwork it at this point), then pat it into a 1¼-inch thick round. Try to make sure the smoothest part of the dough ends up being the top.



7
Using a 2½-inch round cookie cutter, cut out 6 scones. Dip the cutter into some flour between each cut to stop it sticking. Don't twist the cutter in the dough—the aim is to have a good, clean cut. Carefully press the remaining dough together and cut out the rest; remember not to overwork it.



8
Brush the tops of the scones with some of the remaining egg.



9
Remove the hot baking sheet from the oven and sprinkle it with flour. Carefully place the scones on it, spacing them out evenly. The heat will give the scones a head start.



10
Bake for 12 minutes, or until golden and well risen, and sound hollow when tapped underneath. You may need to turn the pan around after 8 minutes to ensure an even color. Cool on a wire rack. For scones with a softer crust, wrap in a clean, dry dish towel before cooling.



Malted Milk Chocolate Birthday Cake

Preparation time: 30 minutes, plus cooling
 Baking time: 30 minutes
 Makes 16 generous or 32 small pieces

There can be a lot of pressure to provide a homemade birthday cake that everyone will enjoy. This no-stress sheet cake keeps well if you want to get ahead, and is deliciously chocolatey but not too rich. It's easily cut into squares once the candles have been blown out.

For the cake

- 1¼ sticks (½ cup plus 2 tbsp) soft butter
- 2¾ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup good-quality cocoa powder
- 2 tbsp malted milk powder, such as Horlicks
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1½ packed cups light brown sugar
- 1¼ cups milk
- ½ cup plus 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

For the frosting

- 7 oz semi-sweet chocolate, about 50% cocoa solids
- ½ cup milk
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- 2 tbsp malted milk powder
- 1¼ sticks (½ cup plus 2 tbsp) soft butter
- 2¼ cups confectioners' sugar
- a handful of colored candy-coated chocolates, and candles



1 Preheat the oven to 350°F. Make the cake batter first. Put the butter in a saucepan and melt it gently. Using a pastry brush, use a little of the butter to grease a 9 x 13-inch sheet cake pan. Line the pan with parchment paper.

2 Mix the flour, cocoa, malted milk powder, baking soda, baking powder, and salt, then sift into a large bowl. Add the sugar and break up any lumps with your fingers. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients, pushing most of it to the sides of the bowl. Whisk the milk, oil, and vanilla into the melted butter and pour them into the well.

3 Using a whisk, mix the flour mixture into the well, slowly at first. Once mixed, give it a good beat until smooth and evenly blended. Pour into the prepared pan.

4 Bake for 30 minutes, until the cake has risen, is firm, and slightly shrunken from the sides. A skewer inserted into the center should come out clean. Leave in the pan for 10 minutes, then turn out onto a cooling rack and cool completely.

5 For the frosting, break the chocolate into a heatproof bowl and place it over a pan of barely simmering water, making sure the bowl doesn't touch the water. Let the chocolate melt for about 5 minutes, stirring once or twice, until smooth. Alternatively, microwave in 20-second bursts, stirring each time. Let cool a little.

NO EGGS?
 This cake is egg-free, in case you wondered.

6
Heat the milk in a small pan or the microwave until steaming hot. Sift the cocoa and malted milk powder into a large bowl, then slowly stir in the hot milk to make a smooth paste. Let cool for a few minutes.



7
Now add the butter to the paste, sift in the confectioners' sugar, and beat together with an electric mixer until very creamy. Follow with the melted, cooled chocolate, to make a silky, soft frosting.



8
Transfer the cooled cake to a board or large, flat plate, then spread the frosting all over it. It will firm a little as it cools, so try to create your swoops and swirls fairly quickly.

9
Sprinkle the cake with the candies and top with colored candles. Let the frosting set for a little while if you can, although it's delicious—if a little more messy—eaten immediately too. The cake can be made up to 2 days ahead and kept in a cool place, well wrapped, or, if frosted, loosely covered on its board.



PATRIOTIC CAKE
For all the patriots out there, how about arranging the decorations in the colors of your national flag?

HALLOWEEN CAKE
Choose candy insects and other gruesome things to top the cake, or stand long, thin cookies up in the frosting, to look like gravestones.

EASTER CAKE
Scatter the frosting with pastel-colored chocolate eggs.



Blueberry-Cinnamon Crumb Cake

Preparation time: 30 minutes
Baking time: 35 minutes
Makes 16 squares

Great cakes for coffee time, these little fruity squares are also prime candidates for dessert, served just-warm with a splash of cream. The batter, made with buttermilk, is tender and light and will accommodate just about any fruit you want to add; turn the page for some ideas.

For the cake

½ stick plus 3 tbsp (¼ cup plus 3 tbsp) soft butter, plus extra for greasing

¾ cup sugar

1⅔ cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

¼ tsp salt

2 eggs, room temperature

1 tsp vanilla extract

½ cup buttermilk (or use runny low-fat natural yogurt)

1 tbsp milk

For the fruit layers and crumb

1 tbsp plus 1 tsp cinnamon

¼ cup turbinado sugar

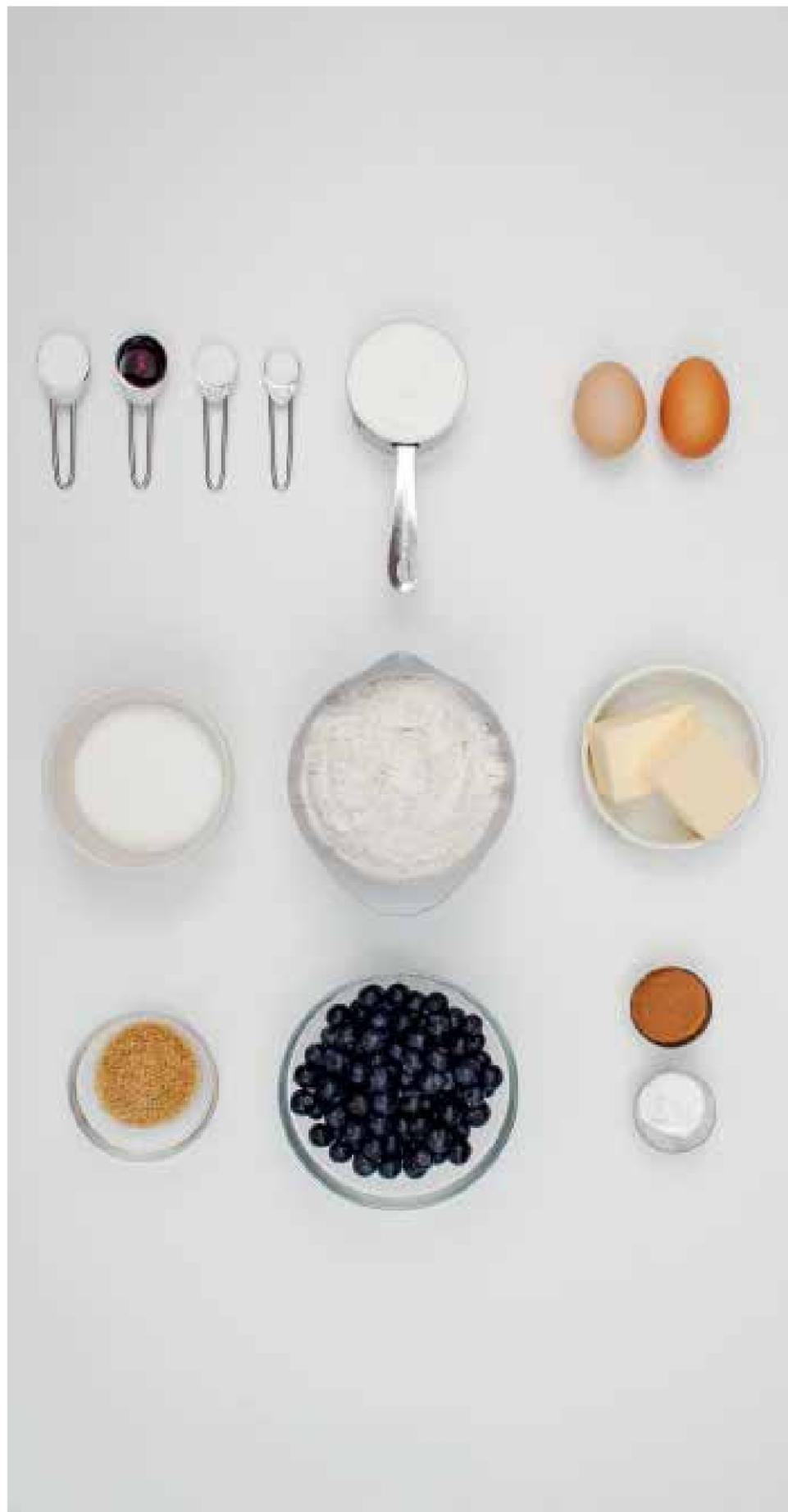
2 cups blueberries, fresh or frozen and defrosted

⅓ cup all-purpose flour

a pinch of salt

2 tbsp butter, room temperature

1 tsp confectioners' sugar (optional)



1
Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9-inch square cake pan with butter, then line it with parchment paper. Put the butter and sugar in a large bowl and beat with an electric mixer until fluffy and light.



2
Mix the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, then sift them into the bowl. Add the eggs and vanilla.



3
Beat everything together until smooth, then beat in the buttermilk and milk to make a smooth, creamy mixture.

4

Spoon half the batter into the prepared pan. Mix 1 tablespoon cinnamon and 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar, then scatter half of this over the cake, followed by half the berries. Repeat the layers.

KEEP THEM SEPARATED

For defined layers, take care when spreading the second layer of cake batter over the blueberries, as they'll try and come along for the ride with the spatula. This will stop once you get going.



4

5

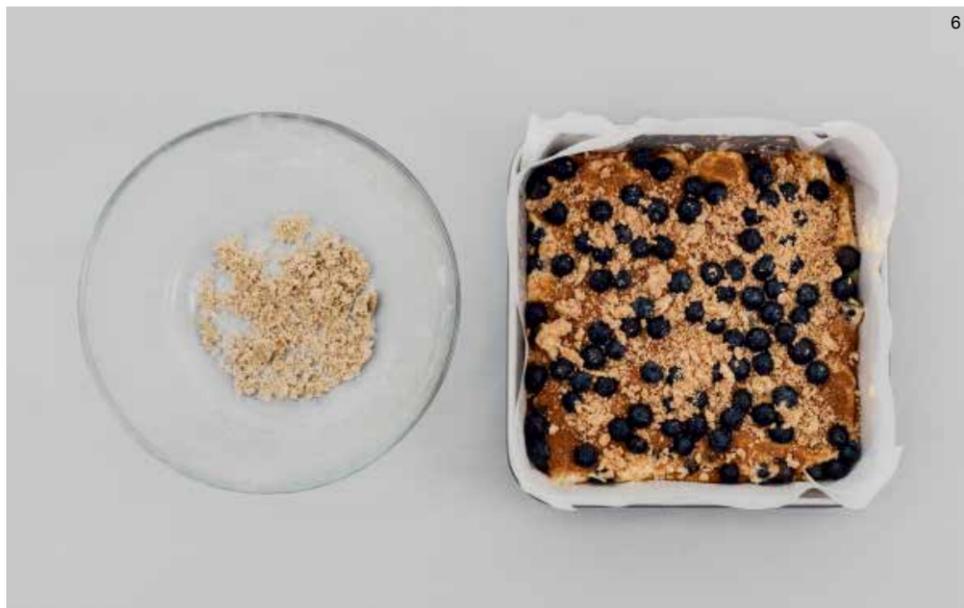
Make the crumb topping. Put the flour, salt, remaining cinnamon, and turbinado sugar in a bowl. Cut the butter into small pieces, add them to the flour, then rub together until it looks like fine crumbs. When ready, squish some of the crumbs together to make big, cookie-dough-like clumps.



5

6

Sprinkle the crumbs over the top of the cake, then bake for 35 minutes, or until it has risen all the way to the center, looks golden, and the crumb topping is crisp. Cool in the pan for 15 minutes, then lift out the cake using the lining paper and let cool on a rack.



6

7

Dust the cake with a little confectioners' sugar if you like, then cut it into squares to serve.

PEACH CRUMB CAKE

Replace the berries with 2 chopped ripe peaches.

APPLE & PECAN CRUMB CAKE

Thinly slice a tangy, sweet apple (to make 1 cup), mix with ½ cup chopped pecans, then layer as before. A few blobs of cream cheese added here and there would also make a tasty change.

7



Rocky Road

Preparation time: 10 minutes,
plus setting time
Makes 16 squares

OK, this isn't strictly speaking baking, but I couldn't leave out such an all-round people-pleaser of a recipe. I like to use ginger cookies in my rocky road, which gives a spicy edge, but really any crunchy cookie will do, such as graham crackers, Rich Tea, or even Oreos for a double chocolate hit.

-
- ½ stick (¼ cup) butter, plus extra for greasing
 - 14 oz bittersweet chocolate, 60% cocoa solids
 - 2 tbsp golden syrup, such as Lyle's, or corn syrup
 - a pinch of salt
 - 1 cup mixed nuts
 - 6 oz crunchy cookies
 - 4 oz marshmallows
 - ½ cup plump raisins, or other dried fruit
 - 1 tbsp confectioners' sugar

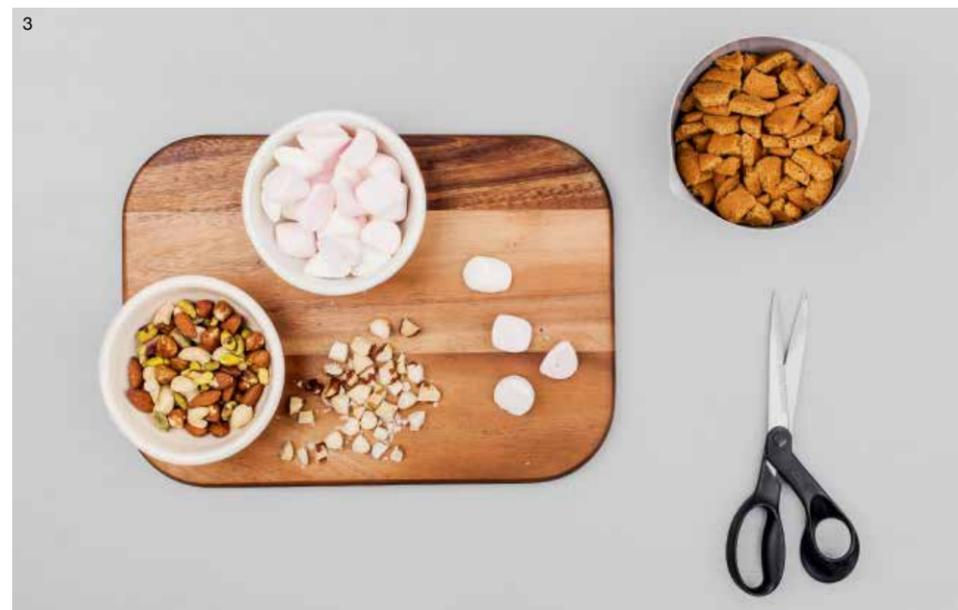


1 Use a little butter to grease a 9-inch square baking pan, then line it with parchment paper. To melt the chocolate, first half-fill a medium pan with water and bring it to a simmer. Break the chocolate into squares and cut the butter into pieces, then put them in a large heatproof bowl. Sit the bowl over the pan of water, making sure that the bowl doesn't touch the water. (This is sometimes called a bain marie or double boiler.)

CHOOSING CHOCOLATE
If you're unable to find 60% cocoa content chocolate, a mix of half 70% cocoa and half 50% cocoa chocolate is every bit as good.



2 With the pan over very low heat, let the chocolate and butter melt together, stirring now and again, until smooth and silky. Now stir in the syrup and salt and take the bowl off the heat.



3 While you wait for the chocolate to melt, roughly chop any larger nuts (such as brazils, if there are some in your mix). Crush or break the cookies into smaller chunks. Snip the marshmallows in half.

4
Scoop about ½ cup of the chocolate from the bowl and set aside. Toss all of the cookie chunks, nuts, marshmallows, and raisins, or whatever you are using, into the rest of the chocolate and stir well with a spatula until everything is well coated.



5
Spread the rocky road mixture into the pan, then add the “asphalt”: that is, spoon the reserved chocolate over the mixture to cover. It won't be perfectly smooth, but that's all part of the charm.



6
Let the rocky road chill in the fridge for about 3 hours, or longer if you like, until very firm. Remove from the pan, peel off the paper from the edges, cut into squares, and dust with the confectioners' sugar.

7
Store in the fridge or a cool place for up to 3 days.

TURKISH ROAD
Swap half the marshmallows for pieces of Turkish delight.

ROMAN ROAD
For an Italian panforte-inspired twist, replace half the raisins with finely chopped crystallized orange peel. Use amaretti cookies and add 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon and ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg, plus a pinch of ground cloves, if you like.



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