

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### Buttermilk – Not Just a New Fad

Buttermilk biscuits are standards, but buttermilk pie? Ice cream? Smoothies?

Buttermilk pie used to be a standard too, but has been pretty rare in recent years. Now it and lots of other uses for buttermilk are showing up, some that our buttermilk-loving grandparents never even thought of. If you haven't tried any of them yet, go ahead!

Fresh buttermilk is not sour. It's what is left of the cream after churning has removed the butterfat. It's not completely skim milk, but very close. And it has a wonderful buttery flavor and aroma. Decades ago any buttermilk that was not used immediately was cultured to preserve it. At first it surely soured on its own, then thrifty farmers started souring it deliberately. What we know now as buttermilk is the result.

Cultured buttermilk is tangy and slightly thickened. The bacteria used to culture buttermilk are in the same family as those that make yogurt. The traditional way of making buttermilk was to store the milk in wooden buckets or barrels. They were used over and over, so each new batch of milk picked up the same bacteria. Most commercial buttermilk today is made by adding the bacteria to steel vats of milk. Either way, the milk is allowed to sit while the bacteria grow and turn milk sugar into acid.

The acid is lactic (from lactose) acid. It's the magic ingredient in buttermilk that makes it so special for baking and salad dressings. If you ever ate a cake made with buttermilk you might have noticed how extra tender it was. Great grandmother appreciated buttermilk cakes because she often did not have special, low protein cake

flour. But the acid in buttermilk helped to cut the gluten strands of all purpose flour and tenderize the crumb of the cake. Regular flour without acid makes tougher cakes.

Buttermilk acid is also the important ingredient is tender, flaky buttermilk biscuits and pancakes. It helps to make them tender, yes. But in these recipes it also helps them rise to their fluffy height. The acid reacts with baking soda to make gas, and that's what makes the biscuits rise. Baking powder has dry acid plus baking soda, which will make them rise, but the flavor and texture are never quite the same.

Buttermilk is also the basis for many traditional salad dressings. As with flour protein, the acid attacks milk proteins and breaks them. That makes the milk thicken, and gives a smooth, creamy dressing without all the fat of cream. The tang of is also a mild background to the other herbs and spices you choose to use in the dressing.

A lot of the commercial buttermilk in the stores these days is not quite the same as Great-grandmother's. It is soured more quickly by bacteria, and often thickened with seaweed extract. It will tenderize the cakes and make the pancakes rise. But the old-timers who remember the flavor of old buttermilk will tell you that the flavor is not the same.

If you have a recipe that calls for buttermilk you can make a really quick substitute by adding lemon juice. Put a tablespoon of juice in a measuring cup and add enough milk to make 1 cup. Leave it sit a few minutes. It will curdle the milk and it will make the pancakes or biscuits rise. But the flavor won't be a delicate and buttery.

One thing you do not want to do is just leave milk out to sour, or use milk that has soured on its own in the refrigerator. When it sours this way it has picked up whatever bacteria or yeasts happened to be floating through your house. They might be safe,

they might not be. They might make tasty buttermilk, or rancid buttermilk. It's not worth the risk.

Here's a real Florida use for buttermilk, sherbet! The tang of the milk blends so well with the citrus, you'll be surprised. It's best made with an ice cream churn, but if you don't have that, freeze it in shallow pans until it's crunchy then process it in a blender or food processor. Repeat the freezing and processing at least twice, until it's fluffy, then let it freeze solid.

#### Tangerine Buttermilk Sherbet

2 Tbsp unflavored gelatin

1 cup water

1 ½ cups sugar

4 cups buttermilk

2 cups frozen tangerine juice concentrate

Soften gelatin in water for 5 minutes. In top of double boiler heat and stir gelatin, water and sugar until dissolved. Add juice concentrate and buttermilk. Freeze in churn or as described above. Makes 2 quarts.