

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### Cornbread by Many Names

Which camp are you in when it comes to corn bread? Do you want the dry, sweet cornbread from up north? Or are you partial to the denser, saltier cornbread of the south? It used to be that those were our main options. But now we need to add Tex-Mex cornbread with its jalapeños, corn kernels and cheese? Or maybe you want hush puppies? And if you go 'way back, there were johnnycakes, hoe cakes and even scald bread to choose from. It just goes to show you how versatile cornmeal is, and how essential it was to our ancestors, when you can make so many different forms of 'cornbread'.

There really are differences among all those kinds of cornbread. And probably none of them tasted like what comes out of a box of mix today! The simplest was scald bread, or scalded meal bread. At its bare minimum it was just cornmeal, boiling water and a little fat to fry it in. Some families made the cornmeal and water into a thick enough dough to knead it a little and shape into patties almost like burgers. These were fried in a skillet of hot fat. Done right they were soft and crumbly on the inside and crunchy on the outside. The batter could have a bit of salt added; some baking powder or used self rising cornmeal; or be thick enough that was poured into the hot fat. But they were still super-simple.

Johnnycakes were also very basic, but the batter was more liquid. It was poured into a hot greased skillet and cooked almost like a cornmeal pancake. Some parts of the country called them hoe cakes because supposedly they were cooked on the blade of a wide hoe placed on the hot coals. (Hopefully the hoe was scrubbed first!)

If you're thinking that frying cornmeal batter in hot oil sounds like a hush puppy in the making, you're right. But there are differences. Hush puppies are deep fried, not just cooked in a hot skillet. And hush puppy batter was traditionally made with buttermilk or soured milk. With some baking soda in the batter, the buttermilk leavened them so that they were fluffier and lighter. Now-a-days hush puppies can have sugar - inside or on top - onions, chives, whole corn kernels, even cheese. Hush puppies are usually little round balls, not patties or pancakes.

Even baked cornbread has its variations. It usually has eggs, flour and milk to help hold it together, and baking soda or powder to help it rise. Some make it with added sugar, which is the more common way in the northern states. Theirs is usually lighter and drier, and uses a more finely ground meal. Southern cooks are less likely to use the sugar because they prefer the saltier additions such as cracklins or crumbled bacon. Southern cornbread traditionally used a coarser meal, and is often denser.

Then there's the new one on the menu, Tex-Mex. These recipes have whole kernel corn and often minced onion and jalapeños in the batter, and cheese either in the batter or sprinkled on top of the hot bread. The amount of peppers determines how spicy, the corn and cheese will make the bread denser. But it's definitely not a tortilla!

Finally there is corn pone. This is baked too, but is traditionally cooked in a round skillet. Oil or fat is heated in the skillet, the batter or dough is added and the whole thing put in the oven. Preheating the skillet and oil makes the bottom and sides of the pone brown and crisper, more like the top of the other baked cornbreads.

Which one you make depends strictly on your preferences. Corn meal is a whole grain, so it's basically healthy. But the fat you use to cook it and how much cheese you add to it will definitely increase the calories. So will the butter, molasses or honey you may choose to drizzle on top. Be careful, but enjoy a real American tradition.

Here's a baked cornbread that's almost corn pone, but with much less fat and cholesterol than most. If you prefer sweeter cornbread add 3 Tbsp sugar. Enjoy!

#### Happy Heart Cornbread

¼ cup vegetable oil	1 ½ cups yellow cornmeal
1 ½ cups whole wheat flour	1/3 cup instant non-fat dry milk powder
½ tsp salt	1 ½ Tbsp baking powder
3 large egg whites	1 ½ cups skim milk

Preheat oven to 450° F. Pour 1 Tbsp oil into a 9x11 inch ovenproof glass baking dish. Combine cornmeal, flour, dry milk, salt, baking powder (and sugar if using) in large bowl. In another bowl beat egg whites with a whisk until foamy. Add milk and rest of oil and whisk again. Pour liquid into dry ingredients and mix until moist. It's fine if there are still some lumps. Put the oiled dish into the oven just 3-4 minutes to heat. Do not let oil burn! Pour batter into hot dish. Bake 20 minutes. Remove from oven and turn dish over onto a cutting board to remove bread immediately. Cut in 12 squares and serve hot. Serves 12.

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