

Bake prize-winning muffins

Warm from the oven, a fresh-baked muffin can turn the simplest breakfast into something special.

To be a winner, a muffin not only needs to have an interesting flavor combination, it also must be picture perfect. So what does a perfect muffin look and taste like? Karen Deherty, manager in the Quaker Kitchens, describes the perfect muffin as "moist and tender with a uniform texture, straight sides and slightly rounded, golden brown top."

The road to perfection has three parts — measuring, mixing and baking.

Measuring

Measure ingredients accurately. Spoon flour, granulated sugar and other dry ingredients into measuring cup and level surface with the straight edge of a knife or spatula. When measuring brown sugar or shortening, pack firmly into the cup. Use a liquid (transparent plastic or glass) measuring cup to measure milk, oil and other liquid ingredients, and measuring spoons to measure small amounts of both liquid and dry ingredients.

Mixing

In most muffin recipes, the combined liquid ingredients are added to the combined dry ingredients and stirred just until the dry ingredients are moistened — 15 to 20 light strokes with a spoon. There should be some lumps. Overmixing causes muffins to have elongated holes called

"tunnels" and peaked tops. Transfer the batter immediately to the greased muffin pans, filling the cups between two-thirds and three-quarters full. As an alternative to greasing, paper baking cups can be used. Because muffin pans vary in capacity, some recipes may make less than a dozen muffins. To keep the heat evenly distributed throughout the pan, fill any empty cups with a small amount of water.

Baking

Bake muffins in a preheated oven. Muffins require a hot oven — between 375 degrees F. and 425 degrees F. To test for doneness, insert the tip of a small sharp knife or a wooden pick into the center. If it comes out clean, the muffins are done. Let muffins cool a few minutes in the pan, then carefully remove. (The steam that condenses will make removal easier). Most muffins taste best when served warm.

If you're a muffin lover, you'll want to try two new prize-worthy muffins developed by the Quaker Kitchens.

Pumpkin Oat Streusel Muffins have a spicy muffin flavor and a crunchy oat topping. To make the topping, quick or old fashioned pumpkin, milk, oil and egg; mix until moistened. Fill muffin cups almost full. Sprinkle tops of muffins evenly with streusel mixture. Bake 22 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. Let muffins stand a few minutes; remove from pan. Serve warm, or cool on wire rack. Yield: 1 dozen.

PUMPKIN OAT STREUSEL MUFFINS

- Streusel topping
- ¼ cup Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- 1 tablespoon firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon margarine, melted
- ¼ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- Muffins
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- ¾ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)
- ½ cup chopped nuts (optional)
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- ¾ cup milk
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 1 egg, slightly beaten

Heat oven to 400 degrees F. Line 12 medium muffin cups with paper baking cups or lightly grease bottoms only. For streusel topping, combine oats, brown sugar, margarine and pumpkin pie spice; set aside.

For muffins, combine dry ingredients including nuts. Add combined pumpkin, milk, oil and egg; mix until moistened. Fill muffin cups almost full. Sprinkle tops of muffins evenly with streusel mixture. Bake 22 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. Let muffins stand a few minutes; remove from pan. Serve warm, or cool on wire rack. Yield: 1 dozen.

Nutritional information: 1 muffin Calories 230, Calories from fat 81, Protein 4g, Carbohydrate 35 g, Total Fat 9g, Saturated Fat 1g, Cholesterol 20mg, Dietary Fiber 2g, Sodium 170mg. Percent of calories from fat: 33.

MARVELOUS MORNING MUFFINS

- Muffins
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- ½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins
- One 7-ounce can crushed pineapple in juice undrained (about ¾ cup crushed pineapple and ¼ cup juice)
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 1 egg, slightly beaten
- Glaze (optional)
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 3 to 4 teaspoons milk

Heat oven to 400 degrees F. Line 12 medium muffin cups with paper baking cups or lightly grease bottoms only. Combine dry ingredients including raisins. Add combined pineapple including juice, carrots, milk, oil and egg; mix just until moistened. Fill muffin cups almost full. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or until golden brown. Let muffins stand a few minutes; remove from pan. Cool muffins about 10 minutes on wire rack. For glaze, combine sugar and milk; drizzle evenly over muffins.



Perfect muffin: Pumpkin Oat Streusel Muffins have all the qualities of a "perfect" muffin — moist and tender with an even texture, straight sides and a gently rounded top. A crunchy streusel topping made with wholegrain oats and brown sugar complements the pumpkin and spice.

Yield: 1 dozen.
Nutrition information: 1 muffin Calories 210, Calories from fat 63, Protein 4g, Carbohydrate 32g, Total Fat 7g, Saturated Fat 1g, Cholesterol 20 mg, Dietary Fiber 2g, Sodium 160 mg. Percent of calories from fat: 31.

Chocolate chunks make scones, cookies taste better

AP — For some of us, there just isn't a big enough hunk of chocolate in chocolate chip cookies. And many entrepreneurial cookie shop owners have discovered that big chocolate chunks bring in the dough.

While the first bit of chocolate in a cookie was undoubtedly a chunk, savvy food scientists and marketers developed chips (or morsels depending on the name given by their manufacturer). Chocolate chips have been specially created to be structurally sound and maintain their shape during baking when added to batter and dough.

In general, ounce for ounce, you can substitute chocolate that has been chopped into pieces in recipes that call for chocolate chips to be stirred into a batter or dough. Be aware that milk chocolate and white chocolate contain milk solids. Big chunks of these chocolates may have a tendency

to burn where they touch the pan. Several manufacturers, regionally and nationally, have developed chunks or large-sized chips to satisfy the cravings of chocolate-hungry consumers. And semi-sweet chocolate chunks are just as easy to use as chips.

The following are two recipes that use chocolate chunks. Chocolate Chunk Scones are great for breakfast or brunch. Chocolate Chunk Blondies are a variation on chocolate chunk cookies. Of course, either recipe can be made with the same weight of chocolate chips.

Chocolate Chunk Blondies are sturdy bars, great for toting or for shipping to a faraway friend. Lining the baking pan with foil makes it easier to keep all the bars neat and tidy.

CHOCOLATE CHUNK SCONES

2 large eggs, lightly beaten, at room temperature

- ½ cup buttermilk, at room temperature
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup unsalted butter, chilled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- 6 ounces milk or dark chocolate, cut into ½-inch chunks
- ½ cup coarsely broken walnuts

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 400 degrees F. Lightly butter a baking sheet.

Reserve 1 tablespoon of the egg for brushing on top of the scones. In a medium bowl, stir together the buttermilk, remaining eggs and vanilla.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Distribute the butter cubes over the flour mixture. With a pastry blender or two knives used

in a scissors fashion, cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir the buttermilk mixture into the flour mixture until combined. Stir in the chocolate chunks and walnuts. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead the dough for 30 to 60 seconds, until combined.

On the floured surface, pat the dough out into a 6-by-6-inch rectangle. Cut the dough into 2½-inch squares. Transfer the scones to the prepared baking sheet and brush the tops with the reserved egg. Bake in a 400-degree F oven for 14 to 17 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Transfer the baking sheet to a wire rack and cool for 5 minutes. Using a spatula, transfer the scones to the wire rack and cool. The scones are best served warm. Makes 12 scones.

Note: For more traditional scones substitute ½ cup of raisins for the chocolate chunks.

CHOCOLATE CHUNK BLONDIES

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 12 ounces milk or dark chocolate, cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 cup walnuts or pecans, coarsely broken

Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees F. Line a 13-by-9-inch baking pan with aluminum foil so that the foil extends 2 inches beyond the two long sides of the pan. Lightly butter the bottom and sides of the foil-lined pan.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder and salt.

In another large bowl, using a hand-held electric mixer set at medium speed, beat the butter and sugars together until combined. One at a time, beat in the eggs, beating well after each addition. Beat in the vanilla. On low speed, add the flour mixture and beat until combined. Using a wooden spoon, stir in the chocolate and the nuts.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top with a rubber spatula. Bake in a 350-degree F oven for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the top is golden brown and the blondies are set. Do not over-bake.

Cool the blondies in the pan on a wire rack for 30 minutes. Using the two ends of the foil as handles, lift the blondies out of the pan. Cool the blondies on the foil for at least 2 hours.

Invert the blondies onto a smooth surface and gently peel off the foil. Invert again onto a cutting board and cut into bars. Makes 15 jubmo blondies.

Substitute similar fish when store doesn't have the kind you want

AP — Your store-catch of the day may not always match the fish variety that your recipe specifies, but that doesn't mean you should toss it back.

You can easily substitute a fish that's similar in size, flavor, texture and thickness to the one called for in your recipe. It's important to find similar

qualities, so the fish will cook and taste the same as the one in the original recipe.

First compare the fat content. It's a good guide to flavor an easy-to-cook fish generally have a mild flavor and white or light-colored flesh. For example, you can usually substitute sole for flounder. Both are low in fat

and have a fine texture and a delicate flavor.

As the fat content increases, fish become more pronounced in flavor, firmer in texture, and darker in flesh color. For example, you can sometimes use tuna instead of salmon. Both are higher in fat, firmer and richer flavored. Here are some more ideas on

switching fishes. You can interchange fish within the same category.

- Delicate flavor and texture: Cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, orange roughy, sea bass and sole.
- Mild flavor and flaky texture: Group, pike, pollack, pompano and red snapper.

■ Mild flavor and firm, dense texture: Shark and swordfish.

■ Distinct flavor and firm, dense texture: Salmon and tuna.

Some fish are simply so unique that they don't have comparable fin-fish counterparts: ■ Catfish: This fish can take on

the flavor of the water it grows in. Farm-raised catfish have a delicate flavor, whereas lake catfish have a slightly richer flavor.

■ Monk fish: Sometimes called a "poor man's lobster," this fish has a sweet flavor and firm, dense texture that is similar to lobster, but it usually costs less.

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