Skillet Cornbread, Sweet or Savory

Heat oil in the 12-in. skillet in a 425°F oven, melt butter into it, and pour the hot fat through the spout into a buttermilk batter. Scrape the batter back into the sizzling pan and bake it until the edges are deep gold and crisp and the center reads 200–205°F.

CARD	PAN	SERVES	ACTIVE	TOTAL
641.815 · R-01	12 in. cast iron	10–12	20 min	about 55 min

AHEAD
Nothing ahead: mix while the pan heats

INGREDIENTS

¼ cup	refined avocado oil	60 ml · smokes at about 520°F (271°C)
2 cups	fine or medium-grind cornmeal, yellow or white	about 284 g / 10 oz · not coarse grits or polenta
1 cup	all-purpose flour	about 142 g / 5 oz
2 tbsp	sugar	25 g · ⅓ cup for sweet, none for Southern-style (see Variations)
2 tsp	baking powder	
1 tsp	baking soda	
2 tsp	Diamond Crystal kosher salt	a scant 1¼ tsp if Morton · about 5.6 g
2¼ cups	buttermilk, well shaken	540 ml · cultured, low-fat or whole
3	large eggs	
6 tbsp	unsalted butter, cut in 6 pieces	85 g

GEAR

- ☐ 12-in. cast iron skillet
- ☐ A pair of dry leather or silicone gloves, and a handle cover if you have one
- ☐ Instant-read thermometer, or a wooden toothpick
- ☐ A large mixing bowl and a medium bowl
- ☐ A whisk and a flexible silicone spatula
- ☐ A thin metal spatula or a butter knife, for the edge
- ☐ A wooden cutting board or wire rack, and a serrated knife
- ☐ An oven thermometer, if you have one

HOT PAN, RAW BATTER: READ THIS FIRST

Hot fat, a hot handle, raw batter.

The skillet comes out of a 425°F (218°C) oven with hot oil in it. Wear dry leather or silicone gloves on both hands, never a damp towel or a knit mitt; water in the cloth turns to steam. Lift with two hands, one on the main handle and one on the helper handle, and pour the fat low and away from you. Keep children and pets away from the stove while the pan is out.

The handle stays as hot as the oven long after the pan comes out. Leave a glove or a handle cover on it as a reminder, and tell anyone else in the kitchen. If the oil smokes when you open the oven, the oven runs hot: let the pan stand on the burner that's off for 1 minute before the butter goes in, turn the oven down to 400°F (204°C) and bake a few minutes longer, and check the oven with an oven thermometer before next time.

Don't taste the raw batter. The FDA says most flour is a raw food that hasn't been treated to kill germs, and not to eat or taste raw flour, dough or batter; the CDC adds that raw eggs can contain Salmonella. Wash your hands after handling flour and raw eggs, and keep the batter bowl away from food that's ready to eat. Baked to 200°F (93°C) in the center, the cornbread is well past the 160°F (71°C) that FoodSafety.gov gives for egg dishes.

METHOD

I **HEAT**

LOOK FOR **The oven has held 425°F (218°C) for a full 10 minutes, with the skillet and oil inside.**

Set a rack in the middle of the oven. Pour the ¼ cup avocado oil into the cold skillet and tilt it so the oil covers the floor. Set the skillet on the middle rack and heat the oven to 425°F (218°C). When the oven says it's at 425°F, set a timer for 10 more minutes so the iron gets as hot as the oven; that's about 25 minutes in all. Cut the butter into 6 pieces and set it by the stove with the gloves. From now on, the handle is as hot as the oven.

HEAT Oven to 425°F (218°C) · TIME About 25 min: the preheat, then 10 min

II **MIX**

LOOK FOR **No dry pockets of cornmeal or flour; the batter is thick, still a little lumpy, and falls slowly off the spatula.**

In the large bowl, whisk the cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. In the medium bowl, whisk the buttermilk and eggs until no streaks of yolk show. Pour the buttermilk mixture into the dry ingredients and stir with the spatula, scraping the bottom, just until no dry pockets are left, about 15 strokes. Lumps are fine; more stirring makes it tough. Set the bowl on the counter right beside the stove. Don't taste the raw batter, and wash your hands after cracking the eggs.

HEAT Oven holding at 425°F · TIME 5 min, during the last 10 min of heating

III

BUTTER

LOOK FOR **The oil shimmers, and the butter melts at once into a pale-gold foam.**

Put dry gloves on both hands. Open the oven, take hold of the main handle and the helper handle, lift the skillet out and set it on a burner that's turned off. Close the oven door so it holds 425°F. Drop in the butter: it sizzles and foams right away. Tilt the pan gently with both hands so the butter melts into the oil, about 30 seconds. Go straight on to step IV as soon as the last piece melts, while the foam is still pale gold; a few light-brown flecks are fine. If it starts to brown, go on right away; don't wait.

HEAT Off; the pan is oven-hot · TIME About 1 min

IV

POUR

LOOK FOR **The fat runs from the spout in a thin, steady stream; then the batter sizzles as it hits the pan.**

With both gloved hands, tilt the skillet toward a spout and pour the hot fat over the batter in a thin stream, low and close to the bowl, leaving about 1 tbsp in the pan. It may spit a little. Set the pan back on the burner that's off and stir the batter right away, just until the fat disappears, about 10 strokes. Then tilt the pan once with both gloved hands so the fat left behind coats the floor and the lower inch of the sides. Scrape it all into the middle of the skillet; it should sizzle as it lands. Spread it to the sides and smooth the top. No sizzle? The pan sat out too long: bake it anyway and add 2–3 minutes.

HEAT Off; the pan is oven-hot · TIME About 1 min

V

BAKE

LOOK FOR **Deep golden edges pulling away from the sides, a cracked golden top, and 203°F (95°C) in the center.**

With both gloved hands, set the skillet back on the middle rack and bake. At 16 minutes, pull the rack out partway with a gloved hand. Push the thermometer straight down into the center until it touches the bottom, then draw it up slowly; the lowest number counts. It's done at 203°F (95°C), or your pick from the table, and a toothpick pushed into the center comes out clean or with a few dry crumbs. Under 200°F (93°C)? Slide it back in for 3 minutes and check again. Top dark brown before the center is done? Lay a sheet of foil loosely over it. Most take 18–22 minutes. When it's done, lift the skillet out with both gloved hands, set it on a burner that's off or on a trivet, slip a handle cover or a glove over the handle as a reminder, and turn off the oven.

HEAT Oven 425°F (218°C), then off · TIME 18–22 min; check at 16 min

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VI

RELEASE

LOOK FOR **Give the pan a gentle shake and the cornbread spins freely.**

Leave it in the skillet 5 minutes; the handle stays oven-hot, so keep the gloves on. Then, with both gloved hands, give the pan a gentle shake. If the cornbread spins, it's ready. If it holds, run the thin spatula around the edge and a little way under it, then shake again. Set the board beside the pan. Hold the skillet by the main handle and the helper handle, tilt it sideways over the board toward a spout, the way you poured the fat, and let the cornbread slide out onto the board, top side up. Cut 10–12 wedges with the serrated knife and serve hot. To serve it from the pan instead, cut wedges in the pan with the thin spatula and serve them within 15 minutes, before the bottom crust softens.

HEAT Off · TIME 5 min, then 2 min to slide and cut

IS IT DONE?

Cornbread is done by texture, not by a safety number: take it out when the center reads 200–205°F, measured straight down to the bottom, or when a toothpick comes out clean; it climbs only a degree or two in the hot pan.

DONENESS	TAKE IT OUT AT	AFTER 5 MINUTES IN THE PAN
Moist, just set	200°F (93°C)	202°F (94°C)
Tender, set all the way (our pick)	203°F (95°C)	205°F (96°C)
Firmer, drier crumb	207°F (97°C)	208°F (98°C)

CAST IRON NOTES

PAN
12 in. The flat floor is about 9¼ in. across, and this batter, about 4½ cups, sits a scant 1 in. deep on it. That's more edge and more bottom crust than the same batter would get in a 10-in. pan, and it bakes to about 1½ in. tall, under the spouts, which dip about ½ in. below the rim. For a 10-in. pan, make two-thirds.

PREHEAT
In the oven, with the oil, about 25 minutes: the oven's preheat plus 10 minutes, so the iron is as hot as the oven. No infrared check is needed; the oven sets the temperature. The cues are a shimmer on the oil and a fast foam when the butter goes in.

HOT HANDLE
Every time the pan comes out of the oven the handle is as hot as the oven, and it stays hot through the rest. Wear dry leather or silicone gloves on both hands, never a damp towel, one on the main handle and one on the helper handle. Leave a glove or a handle cover on it while the pan sits on the stove.

SPOUT
Tilt toward a spout to pour the hot fat into the batter in a thin, steady stream instead of a splash down the side of the pan. About 1 tbsp stays behind to coat the floor.

30-SECOND CLEANUP
Once the cornbread is out and the pan is still warm, gloves on: wipe out the crumbs with a paper towel. If anything stuck, rinse it with hot water and a brush, dry it on a low burner, and rub in a few drops of oil.

IF IT GOES WRONG

WHAT HAPPENED	WHY	NEXT TIME
Raw or gummy in the middle	Taken out too soon, the batter too deep for the pan, or an oven that runs cool.	Check the center: it needs 200°F, the lowest reading straight down to the bottom. Short? Back in, 3 minutes at a time. In a 10-in. pan, make two-thirds.
Pale, soft bottom crust	The pan wasn't hot enough, or the cornbread sat in the pan too long after baking.	Give the pan the full 10 minutes after the oven reaches 425°F, pour the batter right after the fat, and slide it out after 5 minutes.
Stuck to the pan	Too little fat left in the pan, a newer seasoning, or not enough sizzle.	Leave about 1 tbsp of fat and coat the lower sides too. After 5 minutes, run a thin spatula around the edge and under, then shake.
Dense and tough	Overmixed.	Stir just until no dry pockets are left. Lumps are fine. After the fat goes in, about 10 strokes.
Dry and crumbly	Baked too long, or an all-cornmeal batter cut while hot.	Take it out at 200–205°F. The flour in this batter helps it hold; for the all-cornmeal version, let it rest 10 minutes and cut with a serrated knife.
Black specks, bitter edges	The butter browned too far while it waited in the hot pan.	Have the batter mixed and beside the stove before the pan comes out. Pour the fat in as soon as the last piece of butter melts; light-brown flecks are fine.
Gritty	Coarse cornmeal, grits or polenta.	Use fine or medium-grind cornmeal, as ATK advises. Stone-ground is fine if it isn't coarse.

VARIATIONS

Sweet, Northern-style. Use 1½ cups cornmeal and 1½ cups flour (Cook's Illustrated's Golden Northern Cornbread uses equal parts), and ⅓ cup sugar in place of the 2 tbsp. Sugar browns faster, so check at 14 minutes; if the top is deep brown before the center reads 200°F, lay a sheet of foil loosely over it. Serve it with butter and honey.

Southern-style, all cornmeal. Leave out the flour and sugar and use 3 cups cornmeal. Cook's Country's Southern-Style Skillet Cornbread, Sean Brock and Robert Moss all use cornmeal and no flour. It's crumblier and more crusty: rest it 10 minutes in the pan, slide it out gently and cut it with a serrated knife.

Bacon, cheddar and jalapeño. Cook 6 slices of bacon until crisp, drain and crumble. Use 6 tbsp of the bacon fat in place of the butter in step III, added off the heat the same way (top it up with butter if short). In step IV, after the fat, fold in the bacon, 1 cup (4 oz) shredded sharp cheddar and 1 seeded, finely chopped jalapeño.

In a 10-in. skillet. Make two-thirds: 3 tbsp oil, 1⅓ cups cornmeal, ⅔ cup flour, 4 tsp sugar, 1⅓ tsp baking powder, ¾ tsp baking soda, 1⅓ tsp Diamond Crystal salt, 1½ cups buttermilk, 2 eggs and 4 tbsp butter. Same heat and steps; it sits about as deep, so check at 16 minutes.

MAKE AHEAD

Nothing to do ahead; the batter is mixed while the pan heats, and it shouldn't wait. Cornbread is best within an hour of baking. Once it has cooled, wrap leftovers: plain cornbread keeps at room temperature up to 2 days, or in the fridge up to 5. The bacon, cheddar and jalapeño version has meat and cheese in it, so refrigerate it within 2 hours, use it within 3 to 4 days, and reheat it to 165°F (74°C), as the USDA advises for leftovers. Wedges warm through in a 350°F (177°C) oven in about 10 minutes, or in the skillet over medium-low. Making dressing? See R-18.

Cut on the dashed lines and glue back to back, or keep the page.

641.815
R-01

AUTHOR	1538° Well Seasoned · Supper
TITLE	**SKILLET CORNBREAD**
PAN	12 in. · serves 10–12 · about 55 min

Two dry gloves. Instant-read thermometer or toothpick.

	HEAT	**MIX**	**POUR**	**BAKE**	**SLIDE**
¼ cup refined avocado oil	oil in; 425°F +10 min	dry; buttermilk + eggs; lumps are fine	pan out; butter melts; fat into batter	sizzling pan; 18–22 min; 200–205°F	5 min in pan; it spins; slide it out
2 cups cornmeal · 1 cup flour					
2 tbsp sugar (⅓ cup if sweet)					
2 tsp b. powder · 1 tsp soda					
2 tsp Diamond Crystal salt					
2¼ cups buttermilk · 3 eggs					
6 tbsp unsalted butter					

DATE COOKED	COOKED BY	NOTES

641.815
R-01

TITLE	**SKILLET CORNBREAD**	COOK LOG, CONT.
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DATE COOKED	COOKED BY	NOTES

TO READ THE FRONT Ingredients run down the left. Read across: a box joins every row it spans.

PULL AT Moist 200°F · tender 203°F · firmer 207°F, center, lowest reading. No thermometer? A toothpick comes out clean. Short? Back in, 3 min at a time.

OTHER PANS 10 in.: make two-thirds (2 eggs), check at 16 min. The full batch is too deep for it.