

Crumiri (Cornmeal Butter Cookies)

Time: For Traditional Rustic Crumiri, 10 minutes to mix, 15 to shape, 20 to bake; for glazed crumiri, 10 minutes to mix, 25 to shape, 15 to bake, 10 to glaze.

Crumiri are cornmeal cookies, provenance Piedmont, possessing classic European snap (not bend) and a buttery crumb. Traditionally piped or shaped into little horseshoes and dusted—like all things dolce—with powdered sugar, they have a ravishingly fine finish (finer even than the word sandy suggests), and their overall effect is appealingly uncomplicated. The American homage to crumiri has tended to result in a demure, dressy cookie, rolled and iced rather than hand-shaped and powdered. Prettiness notwithstanding, American cornmeal cookies lose a lot in translation, as their texture frequently falls well short of “fine” and is light years from ravishing.

The problem with American cornmeal cookies goes directly to the problem with commercial cornmeal: It’s not coarse enough to produce a decent skillet cornbread, but far too coarse to produce a decent cookie. Anson Mills fine cornmeal, on the other hand, drifts from the bag damp, fragrant, and just one sifter screen shy of corn flour. In both versions of our crumiri, the sweet flavor of corn lingers on the tongue and a subtle, buttery granulation between the teeth.

Equipment *Mise en Place*

For this recipe you will need a mixing bowl, a whisk, a stand mixer with paddle attachment, a rubber spatula, and three baking sheets—two lined with parchment paper and one for use as an insulating bottom sheet, in which one of the other sheets sits during baking to keep the cookies from overbrowning. A baker’s scale is also a fine idea, and a ruler might come in handy. A fine conical sifter works best when sifting the confectioners’ sugar over the Traditional Rustic Crumiri and when making the icing for the Glazed Crumiri.

For the Traditional Rustic Crumiri you will need an extra sheet of parchment taped to the counter to shape the cookies.

To flatten and shape the Glazed Crumiri you will need a cleaver, a small rolling pin or wide-based glass, and a 2 5/8-inch or 3-inch biscuit cutter. You will also need plastic wrap and a small, sharp knife.

For the icing recipe for Glazed Crumiri you will need a small mixing bowl, a small whisk, a microplane zester or fine grater, and a small icing spatula or spoon.

Ingredients

Baking Remarks

Put a slight chill on this dough and it becomes utterly pliant, a lot, in fact, like Play-Doh. No need to coarsen its crumb with a storm of flour or beat it up with multiple rollouts. It’s worth the effort to shape these cookies—whichever version you decide to make—with care. Directions for shaping the Traditional Rustic Crumiri are described below. Directions for shaping the Glazed Crumiri are described and illustrated below. Stacking two cookie sheets during baking will allow the cookies to bake more evenly and keep them from overbrowning on the bottom.

For the dough:

1 1/3 cups (6.6 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 cup (5 ounces) Anson Mills Antebellum Fine Yellow Cornmeal
1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
16 tablespoons (2 sticks, or 8 ounces) unsalted butter, room temperature
3/4 cup (5.25 ounces) superfine sugar
1 large egg
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon almond extract

For Traditional Rustic Crumiri:

1 cup confectioners' sugar (3.5 ounces)

For Glazed Crumiri:

1 cup confectioners' sugar (3.5 ounces)
2 tablespoons lemon juice or 1 tablespoon milk
1 teaspoon lemon zest or 1 or 2 drops anise extract

Directions

1. Turn the flour, cornmeal, and salt into a medium mixing bowl and whisk to combine. Set aside. Beat the butter in the bowl of a stand mixer on medium speed with a paddle attachment until light and fluffy, about 45 seconds. Scrape down the bowl. Add the sugar and beat on medium speed until the sugar has dissolved and the mixture is light and aerated, pausing once to scrape down the bowl, about 1 minute. With the mixer running on low speed, add the egg and the vanilla and almond extracts; beat briefly to combine, then mix in the dry ingredients. Detach the bowl from the mixer and give the dough a few turns with a rubber spatula.
2. For Traditional Rustic Crumiri: Cover the mixing bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the dough for about an hour (a longer refrigeration is fine, but the dough will require a short time back at room temperature to soften enough to shape). When you are ready to bake, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and double up one of them with a second for insulation. Set aside.
3. Tape a sheet of parchment paper to the work surface to keep the dough from

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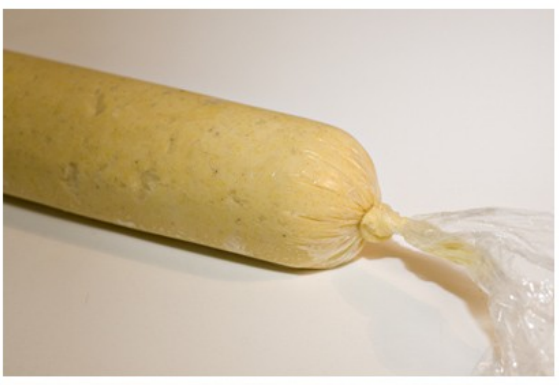
sticking. Working 4 or 5 at a time, break off small bits of dough with your fingers and roll them into 1 1/4-inch balls (1/2 ounce in weight, or about the size of hazelnut in the shell) lightly between the palms. Roll each ball on the parchment paper into a skinny snake, 4 inches long, and untapered on the ends. If the dough becomes too soft, flour your hands very lightly. Grasping the ends lightly, lift each dough snake onto the prepared baking sheet, bending it into a U to create a horseshoe shape. Place the cookies 2 inches apart. You should end up with a total at least 4 dozen cookies.

4. Bake cookies one sheet pan at a time until golden brown on the edges and bottoms, about 20 minutes, rotating the pan from front to back halfway through the baking time. Cool completely on the sheet pan, then sift powdered sugar over the cookies, turning them to coat the bottoms as well.

5. For Glazed Crumiri: Lay a long sheet of plastic wrap lengthwise on the work surface. Drop pieces of the dough from a spatula or from clean, damp hands into a long snake, leaving broad margins on either side of the plastic.



Lift and roll the plastic wrap around the dough, packing it tightly by twisting the ends of the plastic (as if making a sausage) and smoothing the dough through the plastic into a cylinder, 13 inches long and 2 1/2 inches in diameter. Knot the plastic at each end.



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Lift the cylinder onto a baking sheet and chill the dough for at least an hour or up to 24 hours.

6. When you are ready to bake, adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and double up one of them with a second for insulation. Set aside.

7. Remove the dough from the refrigerator and unwrap it. Using a small, sharp knife, cut the dough into 4 pieces.



Cut each quarter in half again to create eighths. Cut each eighth into three equal pieces. You will have 24 disks of dough, each weighing about 1-ounce each. Working one piece at a time, place the disk of dough between 2 pieces of plastic wrap



and flatten it evenly with a cleaver, small rolling pin, or wide-based glass to a diameter of about 3 inches.



Press through the plastic wrap with a 2 5/8-inch or 3-inch biscuit cutter to form the cookie.



Pull the top sheet of plastic away.



Slide the palm of your left hand (if you are right-handed) underneath the bottom sheet of plastic and, with the right hand, lift the cookie gently and place it on the baking sheet.



Reserve the scraps to make an additional cookie or two.

8. Bake cookies one sheet pan at a time until golden brown on the edges and bottoms, about 20 minutes, rotating the pan from front to back halfway through baking time. Cool completely on the sheet pan.

9. To make the glaze: Sift the confectioners' sugar into a small mixing bowl. For the citrus glaze, add the juice and lemon zest and whisk until smooth. For the anise glaze, add the milk and anise extract and whisk until smooth. To ice: Drop a teaspoon of glaze onto the center of each cookie and spread the icing lightly to the edges with a small offset spatula or the back of a small spoon. Allow the icing to dry (takes 2 to 3 hours).

Makes about 4 dozen traditional crumiri cookies and 27 glazed crumiri cookies