

Strawberry Shortcake

Time: About 45 minutes top to bottom

Have you heard the one about the chef who makes a mistake, suffers excoriation, and ends up with an unimaginably delicious dish? Like a fallen soufflé that becomes a molten chocolate cake? Well, this is precisely what happened when Anson Mills' chief cook and bottle washer, Kay Rentschler, retested a biscuit recipe using the wrong flour. Instead of producing quick cream biscuits made with Anson Mills Colonial Biscuit Flour, she produced quick cream biscuits using Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour. Like others before her, she, too, was excoriated: Rice flour doesn't feel like wheat flour—it should have been obvious.

Nevertheless, there was something about these biscuits. For one thing, they actually baked up into perfectly recognizable biscuits. (Rice flour is rarely, if ever, used without some wheat flour in baking recipes because it produces no gluten—the sturdy protein that results when water is mixed with wheat flour). But not only did these biscuits look like good biscuits—bronze-edged and craggy on the surface, creamy white inside—they were the lightest, crispest, most tender biscuits ever. They were biscuits that said “Shortcake!”

After a couple of tweaks to the recipe—butter and milk in place of cream, an improved wedge shape for easy cutting, a shower of sugar granules on top—and we had the best damned shortcake biscuits we know of. What are they like? Imagine a crisp, delicate sugar cookie, dial back the sweetness, loft it into biscuit form, and you're about as close to these ethereal biscuits as you're going to get until you make some yourself.

Equipment *Mise en Place*

For the strawberries you will need a large bowl, a small saucepan, a fine conical sieve, and a small ladle or something comparable.

For the biscuits you will need a food processor, a large mixing bowl, a rubber spatula, two baking sheets (one lined with parchment and one for use as an insulating bottom sheet, in which the other sits during baking to keep the biscuits from overbrowning), a rolling pin, a bench knife or chef's knife, a spatula, and a pastry brush. You will also need a sharp, serrated knife to split the biscuits after baking.

For the whipped cream you will need a stand mixer with a whisk attachment or a hand-held mixer.

Baking Notes

Because these biscuits are made with rice flour, the dough will feel different. Don't expect any of the light elasticity of a wheat dough—the slight drag you feel when you push a biscuit cutter through a regular biscuit dough that signals some gluten development. The dough will feel wetter. Don't worry: You don't have to do much with it beyond pressing it into a disk and cutting it into wedges. Treat it gently.

Let us not forget the strawberries. The ultimate strawberries are small, sweet, deep red, juicy, and local. Of course, local berries aren't always easy to find: Strawberries don't grow on trees, and their season is brief. But a summer dessert as iconic as this needs the best berries you can find. At the very least strawberries should smell like strawberries—even those big, hulking California-grown berries can be forgiven if they're fragrant and ripe.

Having said that, in our opinion, most fragrant strawberries, when sliced and tossed with sugar, often fail to measure up to the demands of a first-rate strawberry shortcake—they're simply not juicy enough. The solution is to sacrifice a handful of the least

Ingredients

For the strawberries:

3 pounds ripe strawberries, washed and dried on paper towels or wiped clean
4 tablespoons juice from 2 large, juicy lemons
1/3 to 1/2 cup (2.3 to 3.5 ounces, respectively) granulated sugar, depending on your taste or the relative sweetness of the berries
1/8 teaspoon fine sea salt

For the shortcake:

2 1/2 cups (12.5 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour
2 tablespoons granulated sugar, plus more for sprinkling over biscuits
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
8 tablespoons (1 stick, or 4 ounces) cold, unsalted butter, cut into 8 pieces
1 to 1 1/4 cups whole milk, plus an additional tablespoon for brushing the biscuits

For the whipped cream:

1 1/2 cups heavy cream, chilled
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Directions

- 1.** For the strawberries: Take about 3/4 pound of the least attractive strawberries—the bruised, the bulbous, the misshapen—then hull, slice, and place them in a small saucepan. Add the sugar, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, and the salt. Cover and bring to a simmer over low heat. Uncover the pot and cook the berries gently, stirring occasionally, until they are completely soft and their juices have thickened slightly, about 10 minutes. Mash the berries in the pan with a potato masher and transfer them and their juices to a fine conical sieve set over a small, deep mixing bowl. Press down on the berry pulp with a small spoon or ladle to extract every bit of juice. Discard the pulp and set the sauce aside.
- 2.** Hull and slice the remaining berries and turn them into a large bowl. Fold the sauce through the berries. Add the remaining lemon juice and stir gently to combine. Taste for seasoning. If the berries need more sugar sprinkle some in to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.
- 3.** For the shortcake: Adjust the oven racks to the lower-middle and highest positions

beautiful berries in your lot to the saucepan, cook them down with sugar and lemon juice, beat them up with a potato masher, and strain off a beautiful sauce. That sauce is cooled and folded through the remaining sliced berries. If your strawberries are truly exemplary, you may choose to skip this step and go for the traditional slice and toss.

Making perfect whipped cream is not a high-speed affair. If we may suggest: Chill the mixing bowl and beaters in the freezer for one half hour before you begin. And when you begin, start slowly, giving the cream a moment to get used to being agitated. Increase the mixer speed to medium-high and beat until cream forms soft, droopy peaks, then remove the bowl from the mixer and whisk the cream by hand with the detached mixer whip or a hand whisk to finish. If you go full speed to the finish, the cream is likely to overreact, and we all know what that means: butter.

and heat the oven to 425 degrees. Line one baking sheet with parchment paper and place it in a second baking sheet for insulation. Set aside.

4. Place the rice flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt into a food processor bowl and pulse to combine. Scatter the butter pieces over the dry ingredients and process to a coarse meal, about ten 1-second pulses. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and add 1 cup of milk. Blend lightly but evenly with a rubber spatula. Add more milk—up to 1/4 cup—if the dough feels dry. (The dough should be fairly wet.) Allow the dough to rest briefly—about 2 minutes.

5. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and roll out or pat into a 7-inch disk, 3/4 inch thick. Score the disk lightly into 8 wedges, using the back of a knife or a bench knife.



Dipping the knife or bench knife into flour, cut along the scored lines all the way through the dough, then carefully (this dough is delicate!) lift the wedges one by one with a spatula and transfer to the prepared baking sheet. Score the back of each wedge with a paring knife;



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1922-C Gervais Street • Columbia, South Carolina 29201 • tel. (803) 467-4122 • sales@ansonmills.com

this will make the biscuits easier to halve once they've been baked. Brush the wedges with the remaining tablespoon of milk and sprinkle them with sugar.

6. Set the baking sheet on the lower oven rack and bake 10 minutes, rotating the pan from front to back halfway through. Transfer the biscuits to the upper oven rack to brown the tops and bake 10 minutes more, rotating the pan from front to back halfway through. Cool completely on the sheet pan.

7. For the whipped cream: Place the heavy cream, sugar, and vanilla into a chilled bowl and, using a stand mixer with whisk attachment or a hand-held mixer, whip on low speed until the cream bubbles; increase the speed to medium and beat until the whisk leaves a trail in the cream, 40 seconds. Increase the speed slightly and continue to beat until the cream forms soft, droopy peaks when lifted from the whisk, 20 seconds. Remove the bowl and whisk from the stand mixer (or, if using hand-held mixer, remove one beater), and beat cream by hand to finish.

8. To serve: Halve each biscuit carefully with a sharp, serrated knife, using the scored back as a starting point. Lay the bottom halves cut side up in 8 shallow bowls. Spoon strawberries and sauce evenly over the 8 biscuit bottoms. You can spoon the whipped cream over the strawberries and place the biscuit tops over, or you can place the biscuit tops directly on top of the strawberries and the whipped cream on the side.

Serves 8