

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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Every blessed crumb

At a recent book sale, I found a copy of "The Humble Crumb," by Elizabeth Jones (Lion Publishing, 1989). Each recipe in this 240-page British cookbook uses breadcrumbs.

In the introduction, the author explains the purpose of the book: "We see and hear so much today of children in the Third World who are poor and starving . . . I am not sure how my humble effort [of using every breadcrumb] will help the hungry people of the world, but it's a start."

A few crumbs saved here and there and, indeed, who knows what the repercussions might be. In any case, it is good to be alert for any wasteful use of food.

If you are privileged to eat crusty artisan bread or industrious enough to make your own, you especially don't want to waste one precious crumb.

This issue encourages all cooks to consider how to carefully use the food resources around them and, as always, to eat with joy, even if it is only a handful of crumbs.

Types of breadcrumbs and how to make them

Hard

To make hard breadcrumbs: Lay out pieces or slices of bread on a baking sheet. You can let these dry naturally on the counter. But if you're in a hurry, put the baking sheet in a 250-degree oven and



Waste not

Use breadcrumbs to:

- * top casseroles or apple crisp
- * coat fish for frying
- * extend meatloaf
- * stuff a turkey, green peppers, or mushrooms
- * thicken a sauce, soup, stew, or curry
- * add crunch to homemade truffles by mixing in or using to coat
- * substitute for 1/4 cup of flour in bread or heavy cake (like carrot or apple)

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If thou tastest a crust of bread, thou tastest all the stars and all the heavens.
— Robert Browning

Our Father, for our daily bread
Accept our praise and hear our prayer.
By thee all living souls are fed.
Thy bounty and thy loving care
With all thy children let us share.
— G.W. Briggs

leave them until they are as dry and brown as you want them. The amount of time this takes depends on how old the bread is, what kind it is, and how brown you want the crumbs.

When the crumbs are to your liking, put in a blender or plastic sandwich bag and grind or crush to the size you want. Four slices of bread should yield about one cup of crumbs.

If you want to make bread stuffing or croutons, cut the bread into cubes before drying and omit the crushing step.

Soft

To make soft breadcrumbs: Use fresh or day-old soft bread. Crumble by hand or whirl quickly in a blender. One slice of bread equals about 3/4 cup breadcrumbs. Note: Don't pack down the crumbs when you are measuring them.

Panko

Panko is the Japanese word for breadcrumbs, but they are different from the ones normally used in Western cooking.

Panko is made from white bread. Some say only a special Japanese white bread can make true *panko*, although a commercial brand like Wonder Bread seems to be an adequate substitute if you are making your own.

But *panko* also differs in having a coarser grind than regular breadcrumbs, giving it a flaky texture that absorbs seasonings well and repels grease. Food fried in *panko* also tends to stay crisper longer.

Panko can be substituted for regular breadcrumbs in an equal ratio. But if you need to substitute regular crumbs for *panko*, expect a heavier result.

To make *panko*: Using the whitest, lightest bread you can find (soda crackers work well, too), make coarse crumbs in a blender or push through the shredding disk of a food processor. Spread the crumbs on a baking sheet and bake at 300 degrees until they are dry but not brown, about 5 minutes. Shake the pan a few times during baking, and watch carefully so as not to brown.

French

There really isn't a separate category of crumbs called "French." Rather, I was intrigued to learn that in French cooking there are several terms that describe the unique qualities of crumbs, depending on their use. Elizabeth David explains this in her book, "French Provincial Cooking."

Chapelure is the generic term for breadcrumb. *Chapelure blonde* or *brune* are terms used for crumbs that have been dried in the oven until they are golden brown. If the crumbs are removed from the oven before browning, they are called *chapelure blanche*.

According to David, some cooks use *chapelure* to describe the brown crumbs when they top, say, a gratin, but when the crumbs are used as a coating they are called *panure*. If you're mixing the crumbs with flour and butter to give a dish some substance, the mixture is called a *panade*.

There is nothing quite like the precision of a French cook's vocabulary!

To make "French" breadcrumbs: Use the method described for hard breadcrumbs, above, cooking until they are the color you want.

Gluten-free

If you can't tolerate wheat-based crumbs, there are some substitutes. If a commercial product doesn't suit you or is not available, you can of course dry slices of gluten-free bread using any method above. Here are some other ideas: corn flakes, cornmeal, crispy rice cereal, rice flour.

Seasoning

Any breadcrumbs can be seasoned to your taste. After you've dried them, sprinkle on



Autumn Pudding

Here is a recipe adapted from "The Humble Crumb."

50 g (2 oz.) [1/4 cup] breadcrumbs
1 cooking apple (8 oz.), peeled, and finely chopped
2 tablespoons demerara [or brown] sugar
2 eggs, beaten
200 ml (1/3 pint) [3/4 cup] milk
6 slices buttered bread
Cinnamon
Nutmeg

Mix apple pieces with sugar. Remove the crusts from slices of buttered bread. Place half of bread, butter side up, in a greased 8-by-8-inch ovenware dish and sprinkle lightly with cinnamon and nutmeg. Spread apples on bread, then cover with remaining bread, butter side down.

Beat the eggs and milk together, then pour over the bread in pan. Leave for a few minutes for the liquid to soak into the bread. Sprinkle lightly with cinnamon and nutmeg, and cover with the breadcrumbs. Bake in a 300-degree oven for 30 minutes.

Serves 3.

Note: This is nice with a dab of whipped cream on each serving.

any dry herb, adding onion or garlic powder and salt to taste.

An example would be: To one cup of dried breadcrumbs, add 1 tablespoon dried basil, 1 teaspoon garlic powder, and 1 teaspoon salt.

Storing

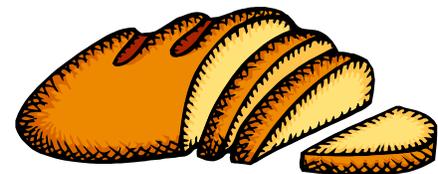
Store homemade hard breadcrumbs in the refrigerator or freezer, in a sealed container, for up to a month for best taste. Soft breadcrumbs are best used within two weeks.

Tips

In her book, "Cookwise," Shirley O. Corriher writes that you can prevent lemon meringue pie from weeping by sprinkling cake crumbs on the filling before adding the meringue. (Why not experiment with using finely ground breadcrumbs?) This book has a wealth of information on cooking and baking gleaned by food sleuth Corriher. Find tips on how to make fried (that is, breaded) ice cream and what types of fried food should have breading or batter.

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"To remove the odour when boiling cabbage, place a dessertspoon [1 tablespoon] of breadcrumbs into the pan when the water starts to boil. The smell will vanish immediately." (from "The Humble Crumb")



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

Contact the editor

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