



Kitchen Cheat Sheet: Southern Cornbread

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Tips and Time Savers

- Once you add the wet ingredients to the dry finish up quickly. When baking soda gets wet it begins to "work" and if you wait too long to bake the cornbread batter it won't rise well.
- Mix buttermilk cornbread by hand - there's no need for a mixer and you won't overwork the batter and make it tough.
- Leftover cornbread makes great croutons!
- If you want to use self-rising flour, leave out the baking soda and salt.
- Leave a few lumps in the batter - it doesn't have to be perfectly smooth.
- Cornmeal should be stored in the freezer if you don't go through a lot of it quickly. It gets rancid and tastes weird plus it gets bugs after too long in the pantry.
- This is one of those things that is best the day it's made. Eat it or store it in the freezer. Leftovers can be used for dressings and other dishes.
- I love making this cornbread recipe in a cast iron pan! See the recipe card for details. You can also make it in a square baking dish.
- Cornbread freezes really well. Make a double or triple batch of cornbread, then freeze the leftovers. You'll have ready-to-go cornbread for future meals—just reheat and serve!

Storage

Buttermilk cornbread can be stored at room temperature for 2 to 3 days. Cover it with plastic wrap or store in an airtight container. You can also freeze it for up to 3 months.

Variations

- You can omit the bacon drippings if you'd like and just use an extra tablespoon of melted butter.
- I use white cornmeal - I think it tastes better and it's more traditional in the south. If you'd like to use yellow cornmeal go right ahead!
- If you prefer sweet cornbread go ahead and add a tablespoon or two of sugar - I won't tell.

FAQs

Can you really make cornbread without sugar?

Absolutely. Traditional Southern cornbread was never sweet to begin with. The corn flavor is the point, not a sugar rush pretending to be bread.

Why doesn't Southern cornbread use sugar?

Because it wasn't meant to be dessert. Southern cornbread was designed to go with beans, greens, chili, and gravy—savory food needs a savory partner.

Does buttermilk replace sugar in cornbread?

Not replace, exactly—but it balances. Buttermilk adds tang and tenderness, giving the cornbread depth without tipping it into sweet territory.

Will cornbread without sugar be dry?

Only if it's mishandled. Proper fat, fresh cornmeal, and not overmixing keep this cornbread tender with crisp edges—not dry or crumbly.

Can I use yellow or white cornmeal?

Yes. White cornmeal is more traditional in some Southern kitchens, yellow has a slightly stronger corn flavor. Use what you like—just make sure it's fresh.

Is cast iron required for this recipe?

Required? No. Highly encouraged? Yes. Cast iron gives you that golden crust and crisp edge that makes people hover near the oven.

Can I make this cornbread ahead of time?

You can, but it's best the day it's baked. If reheating, wrap it lightly and warm it in the oven so it doesn't dry out.

What should I serve with no-sugar cornbread?

Chili, pinto beans, collard greens, black-eyed peas, soup, stew, or a fried egg the next morning. Cornbread like this shows up for real meals.

Nice to Have

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If you're serious about cornbread, a Lodge 12-inch cast iron skillet is non-negotiable. It holds heat like a grudge, gives you those crisp, golden edges every time, and goes straight from stove to oven without complaint—plus the silicone handle keeps you from learning lessons the hard way. Made in the USA, pre-seasoned, and built to outlive most kitchen trends. [Get it here.](https://www.restlesschipotle.com/buttermilk-cornbread/)