



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“A grunt is a stewed or baked fruit dish. The biscuit dough is rolled and put on top of the fruit. The name of Grunt may have come from the noise people made while eating it.”

-From Carroll Pellegrinelli on About.com: Desserts/
Baking

A recent meal at a restaurant started a family conversation about the old-fashioned names of fruit desserts. On the menu was cherry clafouti, baked cherries topped with a slightly sweet dense cake. The name reminded me of all those other strange names, like buckle, grunt, crumble, pan dowdy, betty, crisp, roly-poly, slump and fool. We spent some time trying to come up with descriptions of these desserts and did pretty well. My favorites are slumps and grunts, which, according to the two sources I looked up when I came home, are the same thing.

It is appropriate I should gravitate toward the biscuit-related desserts, because I love biscuits of all kinds. When I was a child, one of my favorite recipes to make was strawberry shortcake, made with real biscuits. I came across this recently in a wonderful children's book called *Epossumondas Saves the Day*, written by Coleen Salley and illustrated by Janet Stevens.

It is Epossumondas's birthday and "Mama was making his favorite dessert: strawberry shortcake - not the kind made with cake, but the kind made with sweet biscuits." When I read that line, I immediately thought back on all those shortcakes I had carefully baked for my family. What could be better than a biscuit topped with whipped cream and slightly sweetened strawberries?

My mother always made buttermilk drop biscuits, with a tangy flavor and bumpy shape. For a long time, I did, too, serving them the way she did, with homemade strawberry jam. In fact, to me a biscuit always tastes best with strawberry jam. However, there was another kind of biscuit I was looking for. Maybe it is a childhood memory from time spent with my southern relatives or maybe it is from some restaurant meal, but in my mind I know exactly what it should be: Moist inside, high-rising, not sweet, not sour, not

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fluffy but not too dense, pale gold in color and slightly browned on the bottom. The kind of biscuit you have to pull apart, so you can butter and jam both pieces. In my quest over the years, I have experimented with maybe a hundred different recipes for biscuits. I have made beaten ones, yeast-risen ones, drop, rolled, buttermilk, sweet potato and many others. I have searched through all my vintage cookbooks, the library cookbooks, and cooking magazines. I have sampled them at cafés and inns and begged for recipes.

My brother - who greatly appreciates a good biscuit - joined the search at some point and he and I have conversations about biscuits. Every time one of us finds a new recipe, we are convinced it is the one. The biscuits served at a bed-and-breakfast in Mississippi several years ago had me excited for a while and I even went out and

bought self-rising flour so I could make them exactly as the cook there did. And they were good - but not perfect.

Finally, I came across a recipe that so far is my favorite. It is in a cookbook I have had for years, *The Breakfast Book*, by Marion Cunningham, and it is a James Beard recipe called simply “Cream Biscuits.” It is completely different from other biscuit recipes, because you don’t cut in the fat. Instead you mix the dry ingredients together and stir in cream. They are easy and exactly the way a biscuit should be. Even my brother, who was skeptical at first, has come round.

Now that’s settled, we are on another hunt: the perfect blueberry muffin. Any ideas?