

Better-Than-Bisquick

Yes, it's one of the all-time most versatile mixes: Pancakes, biscuits, you name it. My homemade version incorporates vegetable shortening.

I know-you may look at the shortening and think "Ugh, Crisco." But to be able to store this baking mix the way you'd store Bisquick, it must contain a shelf-stable fat. And all-vegetable shortening isn't scary. You can buy it in sticks, and it contains no trans fats (Bisquick does).

4 cups all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons baking powder
2 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon sugar
1 cup all-vegetable shortening

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar. Using a pastry blender or food processor, cut in the shortening until the mixture consists of fine crumbs.

Store baking mix in an airtight container or Ziploc bag in a cool, dry place for up to one year. For maximum freshness, keep it in the freezer and thaw before using. Or use it right now in the [Basic Biscuits recipe](#).

2 cups homemade baking mix*
1/2 cup heavy cream

Directions: Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Stir together [homemade baking mix](#) and heavy cream until just combined, then knead gently with your hands.

Take a small handful of dough and pat it gently into a disc roughly 2 inches in diameter and 3/4" thick. **NOTE:** If you have more time, you can roll the dough out and cut it with a 2-inch biscuit cutter. But I assume you are using a mix to make things a little easier on yourself...and your hands are right there! Repeat with the rest of the dough. Bake until biscuits are golden brown and one broken in half reveals an interior of fluffy crumbs, 12 to 14 minutes. Serve warm.

Variations:

Cheddar Biscuits: Stir 1/2 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese into dough.

Cheddar-Bacon-Scallion Biscuits: Stir 1/2 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese; 1/2 cup crisp-cooked bacon, crumbled; and 2 sliced scallions into dough.

Herb Biscuits: Stir small amount of fresh chopped chives, oregano, basil whatever you prefer and have on hand into dough ...or 1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary and 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme into dough...or My [Basic Cornbread recipe](#)

2 cups homemade baking mix* (see below)
1/2 cup yellow cornmeal
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1 cup buttermilk
2 large eggs, beaten well
3/4 cups frozen corn kernels, thawed
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Directions: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease 8" baking pan. In a large bowl, whisk together [homemade baking mix](#), cornmeal, and sugar together until combined.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the buttermilk and beaten eggs. Fold the buttermilk mixture into the cornmeal mixture. Gently stir in the corn kernels.

Spread the cornbread mixture into prepared pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, or until the cornbread is golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Brush the cornbread with the melted butter. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Try any of these variations:

Jalapeno Cornbread. Stir one minced jalapeno into mixture with the corn kernels.

Blueberry or RASPBERRY (my FAV) Cornbread. Substitute 3/4 cup frozen, unthawed blueberries or fresh blueberries (same for Raspberries) for the corn kernels and brown sugar for the granulated sugar. Sprinkle batter with 2 tablespoons granulated sugar before baking.

Superior-to-Shake n' Bake Chicken

Shake n' Bake is kind of a great idea, but the stuff that comes in the box looks and tastes like dust, is bogged down with salt, and is supposed to adhere to the chicken with water, which sounds so non-succulent. And it's not crunchy enough.

Making your own takes just a couple minutes in the food processor and it's fun to think of your own flavors (for inspiration, see below); plus, using Melba toast in place of bread crumbs gives the chicken a true crunch even after 20 minutes in the oven.

1 (5-ounce) box whole-grain Melba toast (you can use plain, but I like whole-grain for its flavor and its golden brown color)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon paprika

Pinch of sugar

In a food processor, combine the Melba toast, vegetable oil, salt, paprika, and sugar and process until the mixture is mostly medium-fine crumbs (it's okay if a couple bigger pieces remain). Pour the mixture into a Ziploc bag. Store in the freezer for up to 6 months. Makes about 2 cups, enough to coat 1 pound of chicken breast. Now use it with this [Superior to Shake n' Bake chicken recipe](#).

Homemade Shake n' Bake mixture* still in its Ziploc bag

1 cup buttermilk

1 pound boneless skinless chicken breasts, patted dry with paper towels

Directions: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil. Pour the buttermilk into a shallow bowl. Dip each piece of chicken into the buttermilk, then place in the Ziploc bag with the [homemade Shake n' Bake mixture](#), seal the bag, and shake, making sure the chicken is entirely covered with crumb mixture on both sides. Repeat with each piece of chicken.

Place the chicken in the baking pan. (**NOTE:** I line my pan with foil and spray with PAM or wipe with paper towel dipped in Olive Oil for easy clean up) You may need to pat on crumbs in a couple places at this point. It's not very shake-y, but the chicken is much better when it's fully covered with crunchy crumbs. Bake 20 minutes, or until a thermometer inserted into each chicken breast reaches 165 degrees.

Variations:

Buffalo Chicken: Add 1/2 teaspoon cayenne to crumbs mixture and 1 tablespoon hot sauce to buttermilk.

Italian Chicken: Add 1/4 teaspoon each dried oregano, dried thyme, and dried basil to crumbs mixture.

Curry Chicken: Add 1/2 teaspoon curry powder to crumbs mixture and 1 tablespoon honey to buttermilk.

Garlic-Parmesan Chicken: In addition to the garlic powder that is already in the crumbs mixture, add 1 clove of minced garlic and 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese to the crumbs mixture. (Do not add these fresh ingredients until you are ready to make the chicken.)

Chocolate-Chip Cookie Mix

These cookies are chewy and delicious and the Mixes make great GIFTS!!!! **NOTE:** Keeping the sugars separate from the flour mixture, and stirring the sugars into the melted butter when you make the cookies, is an added step you won't find on a box of cookie mix. But it only takes a couple extra minutes, and the cookies are worth it! Makes 4 dozen cookies

2 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup light brown sugar, packed
1 cup chocolate chips
1 large Ziploc bag and two smaller Ziploc bags

In large Ziploc bag, combine the flour, baking soda, and salt. Place the sugars in one of the smaller bags and the chocolate chips in the other small bag. You can store the smaller bags in the larger bag with the flour, sealed, in a cool, dry place for up to a year. Or use it now in the [Chocolate Chip cookie recipe](#).

Homemade chocolate chip cookie mix

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Directions: Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and line four baking sheets with parchment paper. Melt the butter. While it's still warm, stir in the sugars from your [homemade chocolate chip cookie mix](#). Stir in the eggs and vanilla.

Pour the flour mixture from your [homemade chocolate chip cookie mix](#) into a bowl. Stir in the melted butter mixture until combined, then stir in the chocolate chips.

Drop tablespoons of dough onto the prepared baking sheets, spacing them about two inches apart. Bake 2 sheets of cookies at a time, rotating sheets halfway through, for about 12 minutes, or until cookies are set at the edges but still appear slightly undercooked in the middle.

SPECIAL NOTE: If you don't want to make all 4 dozen cookies at once, drop the dough onto the baking sheets as above. Pop the sheets into the freezer until the dough is set ...then **transfer the now frozen dough balls into a Ziploc bag** and store in the freezer for up to six months. When you're ready to bake the cookies, the dough can go straight from freezer to oven; just add two extra minutes to your baking time.

Yellow Cake (or CUPCAKE) Mix

Moist, tender, delicious, easy-weird store-bought cake mix aftertaste not included. haha!! Makes a 13 x 9-inch cake, two 9-inch round cakes, or 24 cupcakes

2 1/2 cups (10 1/4 ounces) cake flour (Pls. *do not substitute all-purpose flour!!! cake flour will provide your cake with that delicious cake mix texture, and leftover cake flour can be stored in the freezer.*)

1 1/4 cups granulated sugar

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 tablespoon vanilla

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into eight pieces

In the bowl of an electric mixer using the paddle attachment, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt at low speed until well-combined, about 30 seconds. Turn off the mixer. Add the vanilla and butter, then mix at medium speed until the butter is completely incorporated into the flour. The mixture will look like fine crumbs-in fact, it will look like a cake mix from a box.

Store the cake mix in an air-tight container in the freezer for up to three months. Or use it now in this [Basic Yellow Cake](#) recipe.

Homemade yellow cake mix

3 large eggs

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1 1/3 cups milk

Directions: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour the pan(s) you are using (see recipe description). In a bowl, using an electric mixer, add the eggs, oil, and milk to the [homemade yellow cake mix](#) and beat until well combined.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan(s) and bake until the cake is golden brown and springs back lightly when pressed in the center, 18 to 20 minutes for cupcakes, 28 to 31 minutes for 9-inch cakes, or 32 to 34 minutes for a 13- by 9-inch cake.

Let the cake cool completely on a wire rack, then frost with your favorite frosting (I like the butter cream recipe on the back of the confectioners' sugar box). Note: You can make this cake in a 13- by 9-inch baking pan, two 9-inch baking pans, or muffin tins for YUMMY cupcakes.