

LARGE PRINT EDITION

# Bernice's Kitchen

*Mama's Old Georgia Recipes*

54 Southern Classics for Sunday Dinner and the Holidays



# Hot Water Cornbread

AS SEEN ON BERNICE COOKS

*Mama fried these nearly every day I was growing up, in the same black skillet, and I never once saw one fall apart on her. Mine crumbled for years. The day I told her, she asked me one question: “Baby, was your water rolling?” It wasn’t. Boil it hard, pour it on while it’s still jumping, and these will hold together for you.*

**SERVES**

Makes about 12 cakes

**PREP**

15 minutes (plus  
10 minutes rest)

**COOK**

6 to 8 minutes per  
batch



## Ingredients

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- 2 cups plain white or yellow cornmeal (not self-rising mix, not muffin mix)
- 1 teaspoon salt, plus a little more for sprinkling
- 1 tablespoon bacon grease or butter (optional)
- 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 cups water, at a full rolling boil
- Vegetable oil for frying, about 1/4 inch deep in the skillet
- A small bowl of cold water for your hands

## Steps

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- 1 Put a pot of water on high heat and bring it to a hard, rolling boil, with big bubbles breaking all the way across the top. Water from the tap, or a kettle that boiled a while ago, is not hot enough.
- 2 In a heatproof bowl, stir the cornmeal and 1 teaspoon salt together. Add the bacon grease or butter now, if you're using it.
- 3 Pour about 1 cup of the boiling water over the meal slowly, stirring the whole time. Keep adding boiling water a splash at a time until the batter is stiff, about like cold grits. A spoonful should sit up in a little mound. If it slides off the spoon, it's too wet, so stir in a little more meal.
- 4 Leave the bowl alone for 10 minutes. The meal soaks up the water and the batter firms up as it sits.
- 5 While it rests, pour about 1/4 inch of oil into a heavy skillet (cast iron if you have it) and heat it over medium-high to 350 to 375°F. No thermometer? Drop in a pinch of batter. If it sizzles right away, the oil is ready.

- 6 Dip your hands in the cold water. Scoop about 2 tablespoons of batter and pat it into a small oval about as thick as your finger. Press your fingertips across the top to leave ridges; those ridges fry up the crispiest. Wet your hands again before every cake.
- 7 Lay 4 or 5 cakes into the oil gently, setting them down away from you. Never drop them in from up high, because wet batter makes hot oil pop.
- 8 Fry 3 to 4 minutes, until the bottoms are deep golden brown. Turn each one once with a spatula and fry the other side 3 to 4 minutes, until it matches.
- 9 Lift them onto a wire rack or a paper-towel-lined plate and sprinkle with a little salt while they're hot. Give the oil a minute to heat back up before the next batch.

### **Mama's Tip**

Keep a lid that fits your skillet right beside it while you fry. If the grease ever catches fire, slide the lid on, turn off the burner, and leave it covered until it cools. Never use water on a grease fire.

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**Keeps** Best the minute they come out. Leftovers keep covered in the refrigerator 3 to 4 days; warm them in a 350°F oven for 5 to 10 minutes (the microwave makes them soft).

# Southern Fried Chicken (with Mama's Cream Gravy)

AS SEEN ON BERNICE COOKS

*The first time I fried chicken alone I was sixteen, Mama was at choir practice, and I did every single thing wrong. Cold oil, a crowded pan, a lid on top, and I walked off to watch television. She came home to a house full of smoke and told me, “Chicken is like people. It needs room, it needs heat, and it needs you to pay attention.” Give it those three and this platter feeds four for less than one drive-thru box.*

**SERVES**

Serves 4 (8 drumsticks)

**PREP**

20 minutes (plus at least 30 minutes soaking and 15 minutes resting)

**COOK**

12 to 15 minutes per batch (plus 5 minutes for the gravy)



## Ingredients

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### For the chicken

- About 2 pounds chicken drumsticks (8 pieces)
- 2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce (a few good shakes)
- Vegetable oil for frying, about 1 1/2 inches deep

### For the flour

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon seasoned salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika

### For the cream gravy

- 2 tablespoons of the frying oil, with the brown bits from the pan
- 2 tablespoons fresh all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- Salt and plenty of black pepper

## Steps

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- 1 Don't rinse the chicken. Pat each piece dry with paper towels, throw the towels away, and wash your hands.
- 2 Make homemade buttermilk: stir the vinegar into the 2 cups of milk and let it sit 10 minutes, until it thickens and looks a little lumpy. (Or use 2 cups store-bought buttermilk.)

- 3 Put the chicken in a bowl, pour the milk over it, and add the hot sauce. Cover and refrigerate at least 30 minutes, or overnight for the most tender chicken.
- 4 In a large bowl, mix the flour, seasoned salt, pepper, garlic powder, and paprika with your hand.
- 5 Drizzle about 3 tablespoons of the soaking milk into the flour and rub it in with your fingertips until there are little lumps and crumbs all through it. Those lumps make the crust craggy and crunchy.
- 6 Lift one drumstick out of the milk, let it drip a second, and lay it in the flour. Press down hard, turn it, press again, and pile flour on top and pat it on. Set it on a baking sheet. Repeat with the rest. Throw away the leftover soaking milk.
- 7 Let the coated chicken sit 10 to 15 minutes. The flour soaks up the milk and turns into a coat that stays on in the oil.
- 8 Pour 1 1/2 inches of oil into a deep cast iron skillet or heavy pot and heat over medium-high to 350°F. No thermometer? Drop in a pinch of flour. If it sinks and sits, wait. If it sizzles and floats, it's ready. If it browns in a few seconds, turn the heat down.
- 9 Lay 4 pieces in gently, setting them down away from you. Don't crowd the pan. The oil will drop when the chicken goes in; adjust the burner to keep it bubbling steadily, around 325 to 350°F.
- 10 Leave them alone about 6 minutes. Turn each piece with tongs and fry another 6 to 7 minutes, until deep golden brown all over, 12 to 15 minutes in all.
- 11 Check the thickest piece with a meat thermometer in the thickest part, not touching the bone. It must read 165°F.

- 12 Set the chicken on a wire rack over a baking sheet, never on paper towels, so the steam escapes and the bottoms stay crisp. To keep the first batch warm, put the rack in the oven on its lowest setting while you fry the rest.
- 13 For the gravy: when the last piece is out, carefully pour the oil into a heatproof bowl, leaving about 2 tablespoons in the skillet with all the brown bits. Set the heat to medium.
- 14 Sprinkle in 2 tablespoons fresh flour and stir about 1 minute, until it's the color of peanut butter.
- 15 Pour in the 1 1/2 cups milk slowly, stirring the whole time so it doesn't lump. Season with salt and a lot of black pepper. Let it bubble 3 to 5 minutes, until thick enough to coat a spoon.

### **Mama's Tip**

Keep a lid that fits the skillet right next to the stove the whole time you fry. If the oil catches fire, turn off the burner, slide the lid on, and leave it until it cools. Never throw water on it, and if the fire is bigger than the pan, get everybody out and call 911.

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**Keeps** Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours; they keep 3 to 4 days. Reheat on a rack in a 375°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes, until hot through (165°F). Cool the frying oil, strain it through a coffee filter into a clean jar, and use it again.

# Sweet Potato Pie

AS SEEN ON BERNICE COOKS

*My pies cracked every Thanksgiving until I was forty. Earl's sister Dorothy once told me I'd baked her a map of Georgia. Then Mama sat in a kitchen chair by my stove and told me I was baking my pie twice, once in the oven and once on the counter. Pull it while the middle still trembles and let the heat it's carrying finish the job.*

**SERVES**

Makes two 9-inch pies  
(16 slices)

**PREP**

30 minutes (plus about  
1 hour to roast the  
potatoes)

**COOK**

50 to 60 minutes



## Ingredients

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- 1 bag (3 pounds) sweet potatoes, enough for 4 cups mashed
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs
- 2 unbaked 9-inch deep-dish pie crusts (a standard crust is too shallow for this much filling)

## Steps

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- 1** Heat the oven to 400°F. Scrub the sweet potatoes, poke each one a few times with a fork, and lay them on a foil-lined sheet pan. Roast about 1 hour, until soft all the way through. Don't boil them; boiled potatoes soak up water and that water ends up in your pie.
- 2** Peel the potatoes while they're still warm. The skins slip right off. Mash them, then whisk them smooth and pick out any strings. Measure 4 cups. Anything left over belongs to the cook.
- 3** While the potatoes are warm, stir in the 2 sticks of soft butter so it melts in. Stir in the sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt.

- 4 Stir in the evaporated milk and vanilla until smooth. If you used a mixer for the potatoes, turn it off now. Everything from here gets stirred by hand.
- 5 Crack the 4 eggs into a small bowl and beat them with a fork just until mixed. Pour them into the potatoes and stir slowly with a spoon, only until no yellow streaks show. Then stop. Beating air into the eggs is what puffs a pie up and splits it later.
- 6 Set the crusts in two 9-inch pie plates and crimp the edges. Fill them up near the top. Let them sit a few minutes, then tap each one on the counter to pop the bubbles. This makes about 8 cups of filling, just enough for two deep-dish crusts. If you have some left over, bake it in buttered custard cups alongside and start checking those at 25 minutes.
- 7 Turn the oven to 350°F and set the pies on the lower rack, not the middle. Bake 50 to 60 minutes, and start checking at 45.
- 8 To check, pull the rack out and give the pie plate one gentle nudge with a dish towel. The outer 2 inches should be still, a little puffed and dull. A circle in the middle about the size of a saucer should still tremble. That's when it comes out (about 165°F in the center on a thermometer). It will look underdone. Pull it anyway.
- 9 Cool the pies slowly on a wire rack, away from open doors, drafts and windows, about 2 hours. Then cover them and put them in the refrigerator.

**Egg safety:** This is a custard pie. Eggs are safe at 160°F, so pulling it at about 165°F in the center cooks them through. Never leave it on the counter overnight.

### **Mama's Tip**

Work the potatoes as hard as you like and treat the eggs gently. Whisk the potatoes smooth before one egg goes in the bowl, then stir the eggs in slow and quit the minute the yellow is gone.

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**Keeps** Refrigerate within 2 hours of baking. Covered, it keeps up to 4 days in the refrigerator and about 2 months in the freezer. You can bake it on Monday and it will taste even better on Thursday.

# That was just a taste.

The whole book has 54 Southern classics:  
dressing, collard greens, mac and cheese, oxtails,  
pound cake, pecan pie, caramel cake, peach cobbler,  
and the Thanksgiving and Christmas countdown.

**Get all 54 at [berniceskitchen.com](http://berniceskitchen.com)**

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