

# How to Make a Memorable

For this summertime favorite, all you need is a simple method and your choice of ripe fruit

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

**A**s a cookbook author, I spend my days crafting recipes with precise equations of ingredients, measurements, and times. But when I'm off the clock, I can relax and take a more freewheeling approach to my baking. In summer, that means cobbler. This deep-dish fruit dessert, topped with a buttery biscuit crust, is endlessly versatile. And once you get the hang of making one—I'll walk you through the five basic steps on the next two pages—it's easy to whip one up with whatever fruit, spices, and flavorings you happen to crave at the moment.

Because cobblers are so much about the fruit, starting with the ripest, most fragrant fruit possible is key. That's where the flexibility of this method is such a plus. Even if I set out with a blueberry cobbler in mind, I can change course if I find peaches that are outstanding. I'm also a fan of combining summer fruits, so if there aren't enough ripe, sweet plums or nectarines, I can round out my filling with up to three kinds of fruit. To help the fruits bake evenly, I generally leave berries whole, with

the exception of strawberries, which I halve, or quarter if they're large. I slice peaches, nectarines, and plums into 1-inch-thick wedges. Because not every fruit (nor every eater) requires the same level of sweetness, I'm always ready to adjust the amount of sugar in the filling or topping accordingly.

Cobbler dough is much more laid back than pie or tart dough. There's no chilling, rolling, or anxiety required. I use a food processor to cut the butter into the dry ingredients and then mix in the sour cream by hand until the dough clumps together. I then divide the dough by hand and drop the pieces onto the fruit filling to bake; the resulting biscuits' texture is appealingly rustic, with lots of crunchy peaks.

Cobblers are something I usually make on the spur of the moment, but when I do have the luxury of time and can plan ahead, I'll prepare the topping and the fruit (rinsed, drained, and cut but not tossed with the other ingredients) up to 8 hours ahead and pop them in the fridge until it's time to assemble and bake the dessert.



Raspberry-peach cobbler with cornmeal biscuits



# Fruit Cobbler



## **Favorite combinations**

Because there are so many different ways to mix and match fillings and toppings, I rarely repeat a cobbler all summer. Here are a few combinations that are real winners.

### **Plum cobbler with almonds, lemon zest & ginger**

Dough flavored with almonds and lemon zest; plum filling flavored with nutmeg and ginger; turbinado sugar sprinkled on top.

### **Triple berry cobbler with pecans & cinnamon**

Dough flavored with pecans and cinnamon; blueberry, strawberry, and raspberry filling flavored with vanilla extract and ginger; no sugar on top.

### **Raspberry-peach cobbler with cornmeal biscuits**

Dough flavored with cornmeal; raspberry and peach filling flavored with lemon zest; granulated sugar sprinkled on top.

# Five easy steps to a delicious fruit cobbler

Yields one 9x13-inch cobbler; serves eight to ten.

## 1 Get ready

Read the method from start to finish and gather your ingredients before you begin baking. Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Have ready a 9x13-inch Pyrex dish or similar.

### What you'll need:

**One recipe Sour Cream Cobbler Dough (at right)**  
**8 cups fruit, prepared as directed in Step 3**  
**½ to ¾ cup granulated sugar**  
**1 to 2 Tbs. all-purpose flour, for tossing**  
**Pinch table salt**  
**1 or 2 filling flavorings**  
**1½ Tbs. granulated, turbinado, or demerara sugar (optional)**



## 2 Make the dough

### Sour Cream Cobbler Dough

*Yields enough topping for one cobbler.*

**7½ oz. (1⅔ cups) all-purpose flour**  
**⅓ cup granulated sugar or packed light brown sugar**  
**1 Tbs. baking powder**  
**¼ tsp. table salt**  
**3 oz. (6 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into 10 pieces**  
**Up to two dough flavorings (optional)**  
**¾ cup sour cream, chilled**

In a food processor, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt. Pulse briefly to blend the ingredients, about 10 seconds. Add the butter pieces and pulse until they are the size of small peas, 5 to 7 one-second pulses.

Dump the mixture into a large mixing bowl. Add any dough flavorings (see the box below right), if using, and stir until evenly dispersed. Add the sour cream. Using a rubber spatula, gently smear the ingredients together until the flour is evenly moistened and the dough begins to form large, soft, moist clumps. Bring the dough together into an 8-inch-long log. Divide the log into 10 roughly equal round pieces. Refrigerate the pieces in the bowl while preparing the fruit.



### Dough flavorings

Choose 1 or 2 (optional)

**Finely grated lemon zest:** ½ tsp.  
**Finely grated orange zest:** ¾ tsp.  
**Finely ground cornmeal:** ¼ cup (1¼ oz.)  
**Ground cinnamon:** ¾ tsp.  
**Toasted almonds, pecans, walnuts, pistachios, or hazelnuts:** ½ cup, chopped

### do ahead:

You can prepare the dough up to 8 hours ahead; simply cover the bowl with plastic wrap and store it in the refrigerator until you're ready to proceed with the recipe.

### 3 Prepare the fruit filling

Put the fruit in a large bowl. Toss with  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup granulated sugar (use less for very ripe, sweet fruit and more for fruit that's not perfectly ripe and sweet), 1 Tbs. all-purpose flour (if your cobbler has

any berries in it, use 2 Tbs. flour), and a pinch of table salt.

If you want to add optional filling flavorings, choose 1 or 2 from the list in the box below and gently toss them into the fruit now, making sure to mix them in evenly.

#### Fruit

Choose up to 3, for a total of 8 cups. All fruit should be ripe, well rinsed, and drained.

**Apricots:** cut into 1-inch-thick wedges

**Blackberries**

**Blueberries**

**Peaches or nectarines:** cut into 1-inch-thick wedges

**Plums or pluots:** cut into 1-inch-thick wedges

**Raspberries**

**Strawberries, hulled:**  
if small, leave whole;  
if medium, cut in half;  
if large, cut in quarters

#### Filling flavorings

Choose 1 or 2 (optional)

**Finely grated lemon zest:**  $1\frac{1}{4}$  tsp.

**Finely grated orange zest:** 1 tsp.

**Ground cinnamon:**  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp.

**Ground nutmeg:**  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp.

**Minced fresh ginger:** 2 tsp.

**Pure almond extract:**  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp.

**Pure vanilla extract:** 1 tsp.

### 4 Assemble the cobbler

Pile the fruit into the baking dish, scraping in any remaining juices or sugar from the bowl, and spread evenly. Remove the pieces of dough from the refrigerator and arrange them randomly on top of the filling, leaving spaces between the pieces. Don't be tempted to flatten the dough—the large pieces are important for proper and even baking of the filling and topping. If desired, sprinkle

a little sugar evenly over the cobbler (see the list below).

#### Sugar sprinkle

Choose 1 and use  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Tbs. (optional)

Demerara sugar  
Granulated sugar  
Turbinado sugar



### 5 Bake the cobbler

Bake until the filling is bubbling and the topping is browned, 50 to 60 minutes. Let sit about 20 minutes to allow the juices to settle. You can serve this cobbler hot or warm (it will stay warm at room temperature for 1 to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours). Serve with lightly sweetened whipped cream or vanilla ice cream, if you like.



*Abigail Johnson Dodge, author of The Weekend Baker, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.* ♦