Erika’s Bomb Buttermilk Biscuits

Erika Council learned to make biscuits by watching her two grandmothers. She makes all kinds of biscuits and biscuit-based treats that are so good that people say they are the bomb. Her buttermilk biscuit recipe technique is simple, but takes practice, and each ingredient matters, especially the type of flour and the use of real buttermilk. A piping hot buttermilk biscuit is a benchmark for the skills of any home baker in the South, the envy of bakers around the world.

Makes about 1 dozen

2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, preferably White Lily or another soft winter wheat, low-protein biscuit flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
2 tablespoons vegetable shortening, cut into 1/2-inch bits and chilled
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into very thin slices and chilled
1 3/4 cups full-fat buttermilk, well-shaken and chilled, plus more for brushing
Melted butter for brushing (optional)

1. Adjust the oven rack to center position and heat oven to 450°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda in a large bowl.
3. Work in the shortening with fingertips until only pea-size pieces remain.
4. Work in the butter until only pea-size pieces remain. Cover and place in the freezer for 15 minutes or until the fat is firm.
5. Add the buttermilk in a slow, steady stream, stirring with a fork until dough forms and pulls in all of the flour mixture. The dough should be a sticky ball that looks shaggy. (You might not need all of the buttermilk, or you might need a splash more. No two batches of biscuits are exactly alike.)
6. Turn the dough onto a floured work surface. Dust the dough with flour. With floured hands, pat the dough into a rectangle that is 1/4-inch thick. Starting with one short end, fold the dough in thirds, as though folding a business letter. Starting again with one short end, fold the dough into thirds. (Throughout the patting, folding, and cutting process, dust the work surface, dough, your hands, and the cutter with only enough flour to keep it from sticking. Excess flour toughens the biscuits.)
7. Pat the dough into a rectangle that is 1/4-inch thick. Starting with one short end, fold the dough in thirds, as though folding a business letter. Starting again with one short end, fold the dough into thirds.
8. Pat the dough into a rectangle that is 1-inch thick. Stamp out biscuits with a 2-inch metal cutter. Push firmly straight down through the dough without twisting the cutter. (Twisting will seal the edges of the biscuits and keep them from rising evenly.) Gently gather the dough scraps and cut out more biscuits until all the dough is used.

9. Arrange the biscuits on the prepared baking sheet, spacing them 1 inch apart.

10. Use a soft pastry brush or fingertips to lightly brush the tops of the biscuits with buttermilk.

11. Bake until golden brown on top, 12 to 15 minutes. Brush the tops of the hot biscuits with melted butter, if you like.

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