

RICOTTA-FILLED BUTTERMILK CORNBREAD WITH CALABRIAN CHILES

Serves 8-12

REMEMBER, BEST PRACTICE: READ THE RECIPE ALL THE WAY THROUGH BEFORE YOU START COOKING!

Use **medium grind cornmeal** for that it's-what-you-want toothy cornbread texture. Bob's Red Mill's version is great. And **source the best ricotta** you can find. Will Polly-O work? Sure. But using a rich, high-quality version will yield tastiest results. **Trader Joe's makes an excellent Calabrian chile "BOMBA" condiment** that's easy to find and super delicious. If you want to omit the chiles, you of course can do so, and just let the ricotta shine.

Leftovers? Highly recommended: crisp up wedges in a buttered skillet until golden and crisp on all edges.

1 cup (8 ounces) high-quality whole milk ricotta
1 1/2 cups plus 3 tablespoons well-shaken buttermilk (the low-fat versions work, too), divided
Kosher salt
5 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup all-purpose flour
2/3 cup medium grind cornmeal
3 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 large egg
3-4 tablespoons Calabrian chiles in oil (to taste)

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees with a rack in the center.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the ricotta, 3 tablespoons of the buttermilk and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Stir until smooth and set aside. (This will be your topping.)
3. Place a 10-inch cast iron skillet over medium heat. Add the butter. When melted, remove from the heat.
4. In a large bowl, combine the flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and 2 teaspoons salt. Whisk to combine.
5. Whisk together the egg and the remaining 1 1/2 cups buttermilk in a medium bowl. Add to the dry ingredients and mix with a spoon until smooth. Add the butter from the skillet, swirling to grease the sides of the pan as you pour it out, and mix until smooth. Return the skillet over medium heat until warm, about 3 minutes. (This will jumpstart the golden crust on the cornbread.) The butter may begin to brown and smell—that's ok (and good)!

6. Turn off the burner and scrape the batter into the skillet. Smooth the top. Drop dollops of the ricotta mixture over the top of the batter, along with the Calabrian chiles (and their oil). Distribute in a haphazard way— no need to be precious about it! With a skewer or a few toothpicks, gently swirl the ricotta and the chiles over the top of the batter to distribute just a bit, making sure the toothpick goes all the way to the bottom of the batter. Don't over-swirl... it's tempting, I know.

7. Transfer to the oven and bake, rotating halfway through, until the edges of the cornbread are golden and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 24-28 minutes. Let cool for about 30 minutes before slicing and serving. Store any leftovers covered on a plate rather than in the cast iron skillet, so as to prevent any transference of flavor from the skillet to the cornbread.

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