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## Appalachian Cat Head Biscuits Recipe

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By [Melissa Ray Davis](#)

Appalachian cat head biscuit with butter

This recipe is adapted from a traditional recipe from Bryson City, NC published in [Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread & Scuppermong Wine](#). Perfecting these biscuits has been my husband Morgan's project, so I'll let his words speak:

*"Despite the many successes I have had in cooking over the years, a truly good batch of biscuits has been something that has always eluded me. That is, it eluded me until about three weeks ago. I have tried many different recipes and been frustrated no end as I watch a friend of mine (who learned from his grandmother) toss together ingredients with no measuring equipment at all and consistently come up with incredible results. "You can't mix them too much," he would always say, but mixing was the least of my concerns. At first, the recipe from [Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread & Scuppermong Wine](#) looked like it was going to be another massive failure. After following the instructions carefully--and not over-mixing--I ended up with biscuits that were raw in the middle and tasted unbearably of baking powder. Rather than throw my hands up at yet another recipe that went bad, I pulled the flour out and sat down with the book again.*

*"This was an old recipe, I figured, so I should assume it was using homemade single-acting backing powder. The commercial double-acting stuff I had should allow me to cut the amount in half, and that would rid the biscuit of the horrendous salty, soda taste. I cut the salt slightly as well for good measure. The final adjustment was for the cooking time. Supposedly, these large-sized biscuits could cook in a 350 degree wood stove or 500 degree electric for 10 minutes. I don't see how that is possible. My biscuits were well-browned but quite decidedly raw in the centers. I fiddled and found that 450 for 15 minutes worked really rather well."*

### Flour choice:

The type of flour you use will have the most affect on the texture of your biscuit. We found that King Arthur All Purpose Flour was too glutinous for good biscuits. They were by no means bad, and they had a golden color that was quite pleasing, but they lacked the cloud-like fluffiness that Morgan wanted to achieve. King Arthur (and other non-Southern white flours) tend to also be 'thirstier'--you will need two or three additional tablespoons of milk to get the right consistency of dough. Our flour of choice has become White Lilly All-Purpose Flour (not the self-rising variety). It produces a biscuit that is so light it practically floats off the plate.

## Appalachian "Cat Head" Biscuit Recipe

*Makes six large biscuits.*

### Ingredients:

- 2 1/4 Cup All Purpose Flour\*
- 3/4 Teaspoon Salt

- 1/2 Teaspoon Baking Soda
- 1 Teaspoon Double-Acting Baking Powder
- 1 Cup of Buttermilk, Milk, or Plain Yogurt
- 4 1/2 Tablespoons Lard, Shortening, or Unsalted Butter

\* See note above about flour types.

## **Preparation Instructions:**

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit (230 degrees Celcius).
2. Mix the flour, salt, soda, and baking powder together in a medium-sized mixing bowl.
- 3) Add the lard, butter, or shortening a piece at a time, then mix it into the dry mixture thoroughly with a pastry cutter or two butter knives slicing in a scissor fashion. The finished mixture should have the consistency of course-ground commeal.
- 4) Now comes the tricky part--the mixing. Make a well in the center of the dry mixture and add all of the milk. Using a spoon, stir the mixture. Pay special attention to scraping the edges of the bowl so that the dry flour there has a chance to get wet. You only want to stir until the milk is incorporated into the dry mix and there are no large areas of powdery flour remaining. Don't over-mix here. The dough after mixing should be lumpy, sticky in places, and a bit shaggy in the driest areas. Using your hands, leave the dough in the bowl and carefully knead it about three times. Just lift it out as best you can, fold it in half, then press it down. You may want to sprinkle some flour over it to keep your hands from getting coated.
- 5) To make "cat head" biscuits (so called because they are large--about the size of a cat's head), simply pinch off a ball of dough about 2 1/2 inches across and pat it into a thick patty. Put the shaped biscuits into a stoneware pie plate or large cast iron skillet (or on a cookie sheet). Bake for 15 minutes or until the tops of the biscuits are a light golden brown.
- 6) Serve with butter, jam, honey, ham gravy, sausage gravy, sawmill gravy, or whatever your favorite biscuit topping is.