

FRANK DAVIS
Makes Good Groceries!

CHAPTER 1

Breakfast Dishes



Frank's Country-Fried Cornmeal Pancakes

If you think a big ol' double stack of good ol' Aunt Jemima conjures up memories of mornings from your childhood, just wait until you whip up a batch of their country-style "cousins in cornmeal." Not only good for breakfast, slathered in butter and dripping with syrup, these old-fashioned hotcakes are also right at home on the lunch or dinner table, as the perfect accompaniment to a pot of smothered cabbage, pinto beans, black-eyed peas, beef and vegetable soup, or whatever else calls for a special cornbread. This, y'all, is it!

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| 1 egg, well beaten | 1 tsp. baking soda |
| 2 cups cultured buttermilk | ¼ cup margarine or corn oil |
| ⅓ cup all-purpose flour | 1 tsp. salt |
| 1½ cups plain yellow cornmeal | |

To make country-fried cornmeal pancakes, take a big bowl and a wire whisk and whip together all the ingredients. Note: you want to stir the mixture just until it turns smooth and lump free (*don't over- whip it—you'll make the batter tough*).

When you're ready to cook, heat a heavy, 12-in., nonstick or cast-iron skillet to the point where a drop of water dances off in a sizzle. Then pour in a scant amount of corn oil (or spray the pan with a non-stick coating) and ladle in the cornbread mixture in portions equivalent to the size of coffee-table drink coasters.

Cook them on one side until large bubbles appear in the batter and the bottom side turns golden brown (you can peek at it with the spatula). Then flip them over and continue to cook them on the other side until they stop steaming and the flip side browns, too. I suggest you serve them right away, piping hot from the skillet, slathered in butter and topped with good ol' Luzianna cane syrup, but they're not all that bad after they cool off, either.

They're almost like regular pancakes, only heartier and crispier.

Chef's Note:

1—Use only a good brand of stone-ground cornmeal for this recipe. Do not substitute prepackaged mixes. This is one of those "from scratch" recipes.

2—For the best quality, taste, and texture in the finished pancakes, make every effort to formulate the batter just moments before you cook them. This keeps the baking soda "alive" in the mix and produces lightness instead of flatness.

3—*Cornmeal fashioned into flatbreads, muffins, sticks, or even wedges hot from the oven is always a welcomed addition to any table. But when it's pan-cooked in an old-timey, black, cast-iron skillet, it takes on a whole different taste.*

Frank's Original Creole Calas

This original recipe dates back to between 1750 and 1800, when the crunchy, tasty rice cakes were sold as breakfast items on the streets of the city by Creole women who wrapped them in towels and carried them in a basket on their heads. Today, they're no longer sold on the streets, but they're still popular among the old-line Creole families of New Orleans, especially at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Mardi Gras, and Holy Communion time.

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| 2 whole eggs, slightly beaten | ¼ tsp. salt |
| ½ cup granulated or light brown sugar | 1 cup whole milk |
| 1 tsp. vanilla | 1½ cups self-rising flour |
| 1 tsp. cinnamon | 2 cups cold, soft-cooked rice |
| ½ tsp. apple pie spice | Vegetable oil for frying |
| ⅛ tsp. nutmeg | Powdered sugar for dusting |
| | Maple or cane syrup for topping |

The recipe is a simple one, created first by making a New Orleans egg custard, then folding in rice. Here's how it's done:

First, you're going to need a large bowl and a wire whisk. Take the bowl, drop in the eggs, sugar, vanilla, spices, and salt, then whip everything together into a smooth and frothy custard (which should take anywhere from 3 to 5 minutes).

Next, pour in the milk and, again using the whisk, whip it thoroughly into the custard. When everything is nice and creamy, begin adding the flour a little at a time and whip it all together until you come up with a silky-smooth batter.

At this point, thoroughly fold the cold rice into the batter, making sure that every grain is uniformly coated. Let the mixture stand for at least 30 minutes so that the flavors "marry." Actually, for intensely flavored calas, you can transfer the premixed batter into an airtight container (a Mason jar works really well) and store it in the refrigerator overnight.

When you're ready to cook, pour about 1 in. vegetable oil into a heavy 12-in. skillet (you want to almost cover the calas as they cook) and heat the oil to high (between 375 and 400 degrees). Then, when the oil reaches the right temperature, drop the calas mixture into the skillet by heaping teaspoonfuls (you want them to form thin 3-in.-wide fritters), fry them for about 1 minute on each side until golden brown and crunchy, and place them on several layers of paper towels to drain.

All that's left is to serve them immediately—piping hot—covered with a generous sprinkling of powdered sugar and a slathering of syrup.

Chef's Note:

1—You can find apple pie spice in the spice section of your supermarket. It is an ultra-fine mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, and ginger. Several spice manufacturers prepackage it.

2—To get the ultimate "crunch," first take a 4-qt. Dutch oven or saucepan containing 3 cups water and bring it to a rolling boil. Then stir in 1 heaping cup long-grain rice. When the water comes back to a boil, reduce the heat to simmer, cover the pot, and cook the rice for about 15-20 minutes until it is "softened" (slightly overcooked, but not mushy). Then—without washing the rice!—set the pot into the refrigerator to cool. It is this rice and the starch that becomes a part of it that adds to the crunch when the calas are deep-fried! But plain ol' everyday leftover rice does a halfway decent job, too.

3—Of course, for calas to be eaten when light and crispy, they need to be served as soon as they finish draining. Once they cool and set, they tend to soften, get heavy, and turn greasy. I also recommend that you fry them in only the highest quality vegetable oil.

4—Some recipes call for cooking calas in a lightly greased skillet. I want you to know that this method produces heavy "rice pancakes" rather than light and crispy calas. I suggest you fry them—authentically—in deep fat.

5—If you prefer, you can serve the calas to your guests with a Louisiana cane syrup, maple syrup, or even honey. But traditionally, they are eaten only with a sprinkling of powdered sugar.

Pain Perdu (Lost Bread or French Toast)

It's what you and I and all of our friends and neighbors have been eating for breakfast in New Orleans and all across the Acadian Triangle for all these years. Depending on where your home place sat, Momma may have called it French toast, or she might have referred to it as Lost Bread, or if you woke up every morning on Bayou Lafourche she told you it was Pain Perdu. But regardless of where it was or what you called it, this has always been and will probably always be one of the primo breakfast foods in the Deep South.

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| 4 eggs, well beaten | $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. nutmeg |
| $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk or evaporated milk | Pinch salt |
| 1 tbsp. grated orange zest | 1 stick butter or margarine, cut into 8 pats |
| $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh orange juice | 8 slices stale French bread, 1 in. thick |
| 2 tbsp. sugar | Powdered sugar for dusting |
| 1 tsp. cinnamon | |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla | |

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, orange zest, orange juice, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, and salt.

Then, in a 12-in. nonstick skillet, melt down 2 pats butter or margarine until it begins to sizzle.

Meanwhile, dip the bread on both sides in the egg/milk coating until thoroughly covered. Then place the slices on a wire rack over a sheet pan for a few minutes to allow the excess coating to drip away.

All that's left is to fry the slices in the butter over a medium or medium-high heat until they turn a richly golden color with weblike markings. This should take about 2 to 3 minutes on each side. Repeat the procedure as often as need to cook all the bread slices. Avoid smashing down on the slices as they cook—this will keep the French toast light and airy.

I suggest you serve the bread immediately from the skillet and dust the slices liberally with powdered sugar.

Chef's Note:

1—Suitable breads for making French toast include French bread, brioche, or challah (egg bread). The trick to creating "perfect" French toast is to get the right staleness to the bread. This is best accomplished

by spreading the slices out on a table overnight. Of course, if push comes to shove, you can always lightly toast the slices before converting them to *Lost Bread*.

2—French toast can also be served with *Steen's Cane Syrup*, or a light sprinkling of granular sugar, or 4 tbsp. raspberry preserves creamed together with 4 tbsp. creamy peanut butter. The raspberry-peanut topping is best if spread over the French toast while it is piping hot right from the skillet.

3—One of the classiest toppings for French toast is *Orange Crème*. It is made by whisking together 1 cup heavy cream, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup orange juice concentrate, and a splash of good brandy. Beat the mixture almost to a froth and serve it slightly chilled. Mmm!

Frank's Homemade Creole Cream Cheese (New, Improved, and Super-Easy Version)

There was a time when the only Creole cream cheese to pass any N'Awlins native's lips was made at Gold Seal Creamery under the direction of the late, great Sam Centanni. But these days, unless you're a shopper at Dorignac's Supermarket or a regular at certain signature restaurants around town, if you want Creole cream cheese for breakfast you best make it yourself at home. And you can—here is the *new and improved easy way* to make your own, based on Sam's original recipe!

1 gal. skim milk
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup buttermilk, room temperature
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablet rennet (or 25 drops liquid rennet)
1 pkg. cheesecloth
1 stack drain cups or yogurt molds

1 qt. half-and-half (or 2 cups half-and-half plus 2 cups whipping cream)
Granulated sugar or artificial sweetener for sprinkling

Step 1

First, in an 8-qt. stainless-steel stockpot, heat the skim milk to between 80 and 90 degrees (use an instant-read thermometer). You can do this over a very low fire on the stove or simply remove the milk

from the refrigerator and allow it to come to the proper temperature if possible. Then, using a stainless steel spoon, stir in the buttermilk. When the milks are well blended, add the rennet and stir the mixture well again.

Step 2

Now set the stockpot aside *at room temperature* for about 12 to 15 hours (*don't place it near a heat source or in the refrigerator*). It's okay to keep it in an air-conditioned room, but be sure to move it away from any direct airflow. Usually, a spot off to the side on a kitchen counter works well.

Keep in mind that once the mixture is placed on the countertop and begins to rest, you must not stir it again (stirring inhibits curd formation). Ideally, the pot should be covered with a layer or two of cheesecloth (you can tape it in place), because air is needed for processing the cheese and the cheesecloth also keeps out interested critters.

Step 3

After the curds have set up, ladle off the whey (that's the watery liquid that rises to the surface of the pot) and discard it. Then scoop out the curds with a stainless-steel spoon, transfer them to the drain cups or yogurt molds, and allow the additional whey to drip away. Since dripping could literally continue for a day or so, I suggest that you put the cups or molds into a large baking pan to catch the liquids. When the curds no longer drip, the cheese is ready.

Step 4

At this point, it is time to scoop the cheese into bowls or plastic tubs or whatever containers you intend to use to store it in. Then immediately cap the containers and refrigerate them for 4 to 6 hours to allow the cheese to set.

Step 5

When the curds have molded, uncap the containers and cover each "cake" with a generous portion of half-and-half or whipping cream or a combination of both. When you're ready to eat, sprinkle the Creole cream cheese liberally with granulated sugar or artificial sweetener and serve with a piece of crispy French bread for dipping.

Chef's Note:

1—*The original unaltered recipe from Gold Seal Creamery can be found on page 251 of my Frank Davis Cooks Cajun, Creole, and Crescent City cookbook. The recipe in this book has been simplified so that the cream cheese can be made quickly and easily in anyone's kitchen.*

2—*It is extremely critical that you do not allow the skim milk to get cooler than 70 degrees or higher than 90 degrees at the time you add the rennet. Actually, an even 80 degrees is ideal.*

3—*Some select specialty cheese stores carry rennet, as do several outlets found on the Internet. Simply go to your favorite search engine (Google, for example) and type in RENNET, CHEESEMAKING. You get lots of sources from which you can buy direct. In New Orleans, though, the locals can find rennet in good supply all the time at Dorignac's Supermarket on Veterans Boulevard. Their brand is made by Junket and is located in the Jell-O and pudding section.*

4—*If you don't have drain cups or yogurt molds, you can make your own by taking an ice pick and poking a bunch of holes in the plastic tubs that you've saved from grated cheese, crabmeat, dips, or margarine spread. Just make as many holes as it takes to quickly drain the cheese curd. Wide-mouth Styrofoam tubs, particularly the 8- or 10-oz. sizes, also make great drain molds when holes are poked in them.*

5—*Go ahead and make a big batch of Creole cream cheese when you make it. It will keep beautifully in your refrigerator for at least a month and, according to Crescent City tradition, it makes a great choice for either breakfast or supper.*

Ray and Serenia's Famous Mayhaw Jelly

From the quiet backwoods of Bogalusa, where country living is an everyday peaceful way of life, come some of the best down-home delicacies you ever put pass yo' lips! And one of those special treats is old-fashioned mayhaw jelly. Few folks make it better than Ray and Serenia Applewhite, and they were kind enough to share their recipe with me. I hereby do likewise, y'all!

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| 3 qt. water, bottled preferred | 5½ cups granular sugar |
| 1 gal. mayhaw berries, washed and sorted | 1 tbsp. fresh-squeezed lemon juice |
| 1 box powdered pectin | 2 tsp. butter |

The procedure for this recipe is simple—bring the water to a rolling boil and stir in all the berries. Then when the water comes back to a boil, cook the mayhaws hard for 30 minutes. When they're done, mash them in the liquid with a potato masher.

Next, using a large sieve, strain the juice from the berry pulp and discard the pulp. Then measure out exactly 4 cups of juice and transfer it to a large pot (an 8-qt. stainless-steel stockpot will do nicely). At this point, while the juice is still hot, stir in the pectin and bring the mixture back to a hard rolling boil, stirring it occasionally. Then pour in all the sugar at once and stir it continuously until the sugar fully dissolves. Finally, add and stir in the lemon juice and butter.

Once again bring the liquid to a full rolling boiling (a boil that rises to the top and cannot be stirred down). The secret here is to boil it hard for exactly *1 minute and 15 seconds* (and stir it constantly). When the time is up, immediately remove the pot from the heat and skim the foam off the top with a metal spoon.

All that's left is to ladle the hot liquid into sterilized jelly jars, leaving about ¼-in. headspace. Then wipe the jar edges with a damp cloth and seal the jars tightly with new lids. The mayhaw jellies will set up (gel) when the jars cool to room temperature.

This recipe will make 6 half-pint jars.

Chef's Note:

1—Try not to make more mayhaw jelly than you'll use in about 6 weeks' time. Once in the jars, the jelly slowly loses its bright cherry-red color, and over a matter of weeks it also loses its fresh mayhaw taste.

2—Strained juice can be kept in the refrigerator for approximately 2 weeks prior to turning it into jelly.

3—Strained juice also keeps well in the freezer for up to a full year!

New Orleans Quick-n-Easy Breakfast Wraps

You need slightly beaten eggs, four different kinds of cheeses, a dab of butter for extra flavoring, and your favorite omelet fillings. Combine everything, roll it up inside a heated flour tortilla, shape it into a genuine “wrap,” and you got one of those breakfasts Grandma usta make for the neighborhood kids before school!

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| 2 large eggs | 1 tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese |
| 1 tbsp. water | 2 tbsp. diced red bell pepper |
| $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. Frank Davis Sprinkling | 2 tbsp. diced yellow bell pepper |
| Spice or salt and black pepper | 2 tbsp. diced green bell pepper |
| 1 flour tortilla, 10-in. size | 2 tbsp. thinly sliced green onions |
| Cooking spray | $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. seeded and minced Jalapeno peppers |
| 2 tsp. butter or margarine | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup warm salsa, medium style (or 1 cup diced avocado and tomato with lime juice, chilled) |
| $\frac{1}{3}$ cup cooked and minced breakfast sausage | 2 tbsp. minced parsley |
| 3 tbsp. shredded Monterey Jack cheese | |
| 3 tbsp. shredded Swiss cheese | |
| 3 tbsp. shredded cheddar or Colby cheese | |

The first thing you do is crack the eggs into a quart-size bowl and slightly beat them. Then pour the water over the eggs and gently whisk that around as well. This is also the time when you evenly shake on the Sprinkling Spice (or salt and black pepper).

Then when you're ready for breakfast, place a 10-in., nonstick skillet with sloping sides on the fire and warm the tortilla. When it's heated, remove it from the pan, set it on a plate, and invert a second plate on top of it to keep it warm (and to keep it from drying out). Then spray another 10-in., nonstick skillet with a light coating of cooking spray, turn the heat up to medium high, and quickly melt the butter (*but do not let it burn!*).

Then immediately pour in the eggs and begin pulling their outside edges into the center (this causes them to cook evenly without scorching). Then when a slight “mound” of cooked eggs begins to collect in the center of the pan, begin tilting and rolling the pan to allow the remaining uncooked eggs to run to the outside edge. Then as soon as they *set* and *quit running*, but are still nice and moist, remove them from the heat.

It’s at this point that the filling ingredients get sprinkled evenly over the omelet—*first the sausage, then the Monterey Jack, then the Swiss, then the cheddar, then the Parmesan, then the bell peppers, then the green onions, and then finally the Jalapenos*. By the way, it’s okay to create in advance a mixture of the cheeses and a mixture of the peppers in order to simplify the procedure.

All that’s left to do now is to slide the filled omelet directly out of the pan onto the warm tortilla and roll it into a wrap. The best way to do this is to first fold the bottom of the tortilla up about 1 in. Then fold the left and right sides over about 1 in. Then commence to roll the omelet inside of the tortilla so that the wrap ends with the seam side facing down. *Note: since the eggs will finish cooking inside the tortilla, allow the wrap to “rest” for 1-2 minutes before slicing it in half on a bias (diagonally).*

When you’re ready to eat, serve both halves of the wrap on a warm plate alongside salsa or a chilled fresh avocado-tomato relish. Garnish the plate with parsley and top off the presentation with a tall glass of cold milk!

Chef’s Note:

1—Adding water to the eggs keeps the omelet light and fluffy. Using milk or cream produces a richer omelet, but a heavier one.

2—The secret to making a “tender” omelet is to cook it over a medium-high heat for a very short period of time (actually until the eggs are still shiny and moist but no longer runny). This takes a little getting used to and demands the undivided attention of the cook. Should focus be diverted away from the eggs and the skillet, even for a short time, the eggs will end up rubbery and scorched!

3—A wooden spoon or rubber spatula is the preferred tool for cooking omelets. And in spite of their marketing label, the least efficient tool is the old metal egg turner.

4—If you prefer a filling other than breakfast sausage, you can substitute ham, prosciutto, cocktail shrimp, baked or grilled oysters, crawfish tails, lump crabmeat, or whatever else your tastebuds desire.

5—These wraps are best done 2 eggs at a time. Leave the 3- and 4-egg omelets to the restaurant cooks, and I heartily suggest you prepare these wraps one at a time without trying to double the recipe.

Great Grandma's Gourmet Grits

Just about every Southerner since Scarlett and Rhett has whipped up a batch of grits at one time or another. And just about everybody on the bayou spices 'em up once in a while with a little cheese and a little bacon. But try this version the next time you fix breakfast. What you end up with is some hominy that's nothing short of gourmet fare!

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| $\frac{3}{4}$ stick real butter | 4 cups rapidly boiling water |
| 1 cup minced onions | 1 cup finely crumbled bacon |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup minced green bell pepper | 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese |
| 1 cup Quaker Quick Grits | |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt | |

First, in a heavy saucepan, melt $\frac{1}{2}$ stick butter over medium heat, toss in the onions and the bell pepper, and sauté the mixture until the vegetables soften and just start to brown.

Then, while the seasoning vegetables are cooking, take a 4-qt. Dutch oven and slowly stir the grits—*along with the salt*—into the boiling water. When the water comes back to a boil, reduce the heat to simmer, cover the pot, and cook for about 4 minutes or until the grits reach the consistency you desire (thicker is best for this recipe).

At this point, remove the pot from the heat and stir in the sautéed vegetables, the leftover $\frac{1}{4}$ stick butter, and all of the remaining ingredients, making sure that they are thoroughly blended into the grits.

Finally, all that's left to do is season 'em up with salt and black pepper to taste (or 1-2 dashes Frank Davis Sprinkling Spice if you got some), tightly cover the Dutch oven, and let the mixture "set up" for about 5 minutes before you serve it. The texture will be creamy and the flavor will be richer than any grits you ever ate!

Chef's Note: Now if you have grits left over, don't throw them away. Put them into the refrigerator and let them get cold. Then cut them into $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. slices, separate them with sheets of waxed paper, and freeze them. The next time you prepare breakfast, just drop the slices into hot butter and pan-fry them to a golden brown along with your eggs, bacon, or sausage. It's a whole different treat!