



ANITA L. ARAMBULA

Confessions of a Foodie

# Midnight stack

FOOD STYLING AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANITA L. ARAMBULA CONFESSIONS OF A FOODIE PHOTOS

## How to make Easy Buttermilk Pancakes With Blueberry Maple Syrup



Start by melting the butter in the microwave and set aside to cool.



Whisk the dry ingredients until they're well combined.



Beat the eggs with a whisk to scramble well.



Whisk in the buttermilk and extracts until thick and frothy.



Add and whisk in the butter.



Combine the wet into the dry; carefully fold them together.



Fold JUST UNTIL most of the dry flour is incorporated; the batter will be very lumpy. Leave it to rest for 15 minutes.



Meanwhile, bring the blueberries, syrup and water to a hard boil, then simmer for 10 minutes.



Back to the pancakes, brush oil onto a hot griddle.



Scoop up the batter and place it on the griddle (only minimally disrupting the batter in the bowl). Quickly and lightly, spread the batter onto the griddle.



Flip when surface bubbles start popping. Bake until done.



While the pancakes are cooking, finish the syrup. Stir in the lemon juice, remove from the heat. Use an immersion blender or transfer to a regular blender to puree.



To serve, butter the pancakes and drizzle with blueberry syrup. Leftover pancakes freeze well for a quick breakfast later in the week.

## Easy Buttermilk Pancakes With Blueberry Maple Syrup

Makes 4 to 6 servings

1/4 cup salted butter, plus more for serving  
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt  
3 large eggs  
2 cups cold buttermilk  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon almond extract  
Neutral oil to grease the griddle

### FOR THE SYRUP:

2 cups blueberries (fresh or frozen)  
1/2 cup maple syrup  
2 tablespoons plus 1 cup water, divided use

1 tablespoon cornstarch  
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

Melt 1/4 cup of butter in the microwave and set aside to cool.

Whisk the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large bowl, ensuring that they are well combined.

Crack the eggs into a medium-size bowl and beat with a whisk to scramble well. Add the buttermilk and extracts. Whisk vigorously until thick and frothy. Slowly add the butter while whisking (the slow incorporation keeps the warm butter from scrambling the eggs).

Add the buttermilk mixture to the flour all at once. Using a rubber spatula, fold the two together JUST UNTIL most of the flour is incorporated (about 22 to 25 folds); the batter will be very lumpy. Leave the batter to rest for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the syrup. Add the blueberries, syrup and 1 cup water to a saucepan and bring to a hard boil.

Warm a griddle or large skillet on medium-low while you wait for the blueberries to boil. Place a heatproof platter in the oven and turn it on to its warm or lowest setting.

Once the blueberries are boiling, bring the heat down to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Whisk 2 tablespoons of water with the cornstarch until lump-free, then whisk it into the blueberries; simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice, remove from the heat. Use an immersion blender or transfer to a regular blender to puree the syrup until smooth. Set aside until ready to use.

Using a silicone pastry brush, brush a thin layer of oil onto the hot griddle. Using a 1/4 measuring cup or large cookie scoop, carefully scoop up the batter and place it on the griddle (only minimally disrupting the batter in the bowl). Quickly and lightly, spread the batter just a little bit (you don't want to deflate or make the pancake flat, you're just looking to spread it to about 3 1/2 inches wide). Bake undisturbed until bubbles start popping on the surface, then flip. Bake the second side for 2 minutes or until golden and done to your liking. Transfer the pancakes to the warmed platter as they finish baking, keeping them in the oven until ready to eat.

To serve, butter the pancakes and drizzle with blueberry syrup. Optionally, top with more fresh blueberries.

Leftover pancakes freeze well for a quick breakfast later in the week. Stack the thoroughly cooled pancakes between sheets of wax paper, place them in a resealable bag and freeze for up to 3 months. When ready to enjoy again, remove the wax paper and warm them in a single layer in the microwave.

Thick, fluffy buttermilk pancakes bring back memories of special meals with Dad in the wee hours of the morning — but they're delicious at any time of day

Pancakes were a huge part of my childhood. My siblings and I used to take turns spending the night at Grandma's house on the weekends for most of our youth. Once a month, we would all sleep over simultaneously, giving my parents much-needed alone time. Grandma's from-scratch pancakes drenched in Karo corn syrup were our favorite breakfast. The pancakes were thick and massive — as big as the dinner plate they sat on — with a unique flavor and slightly chewy yet pillowy texture that we all loved. All these years later, a bite of clear corn syrup-covered pancakes snaps me right back to those Saturday mornings eating breakfast with Grandpa as Grandma kept the pancakes coming.

Then there were Dad's pancakes. When we were in elementary school, Dad worked as a carpet layer. He often worked the second shift because his company did a lot of work in office buildings — they'd have to wait until the end of a regular business day for the building to mostly vacate before starting. During these jobs, Dad would get home between midnight and 3 in the morning and often made himself breakfast. Occasionally, he would make a massive stack of almond-flavored pancakes, then gently wake us girls up to have breakfast with him. The pancakes, which we came to call "midnight pancakes," were delicious, but it was this quiet time with him in the wee hours of the morning that we especially looked forward to. Tummies full, he'd tuck us back into bed an hour later, and we'd sleep until it was time to get ready for school.

As an adult, I've come to prefer a savory breakfast, rarely opting for pancakes or waffles. But midnight pancakes? I admit to sometimes honoring this tradition with these buttermilk pancakes that always remind me of happy family memories.

### Tips for making the best fluffy buttermilk pancakes

The No. 1 secret to fluffy pancakes is not to overmix the batter. I can't stress this enough. When you mix the batter until smooth, you wind up with a runnier batter and thin, tough pancakes. Use a whisk to combine the dry ingredients and again to combine all of the wet ingredients. Switch to a rubber spatula when combining the two. And this next step is crucial: Do not stir or beat the batter. Instead, gently fold the batter over itself, rotating the bowl with your other hand as you do so for a mere 22 to 25 gentle folds. Make sure to scrape the bottom of the bowl as you fold and occasionally, scrape the sides of the bowl, too. The batter will be very lumpy, which is precisely what you want. After this initial folding, do not stir or fold the batter again. Period.

The next tip is letting the batter rest for at least 15 minutes (it's a good time to get the berry syrup started and place the griddle on the stove over medium low heat to slowly warm up). While the batter is resting, any streaks of flour and all those lovely lumps will hydrate, creating a thick batter. This resting time will also ensure that the baking soda is fully activated by the acid in the buttermilk, producing carbon dioxide gas, which will provide lift as the pancakes bake.

Although nonstick pans and griddles are perfectly serviceable, I prefer a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet or griddle. The cast iron holds heat well so that I can keep the heat at medium-low for more controlled cooking.

Whether to use butter or oil on the griddle to cook the pancakes is personal preference. Butter will brown quickly, giving you darker pancakes with crispier edges and a nutty exterior. Oil won't burn the exterior of the pancakes or give any added flavor, but you're more likely to get a golden pancake. If you want a perfectly smooth, golden surface, use a paper towel to give the surface a light smear of oil, rubbing it in and wiping off excess. I'm not that particular and don't mind the rings and craters on the pancake surface caused by just brushing oil on the skillet and leaving the little pools of hot oil — I enjoy the added texture.

The next tip is about cooking the pancakes. To keep a consistent size, use a measuring cup to scoop the batter onto the pan or griddle (dip the scoop into the batter without stirring). A 1/4 cup will yield about a 4-inch pancake. For 4 to 5 inches, use a 1/3 cup, and for a good-sized 6- to 7-inch pancake, use a 1/2 cup. You can also use a spring-loaded portion scoop (a large cookie or ice cream scoop, for instance, which is my preference). I am not concerned with making perfectly round pancakes, but this batter is very thick and won't spread on its own. So once the batter hits the griddle, I LIGHTLY and quickly swirl it out just a bit to make it a little bigger by spreading some of the batter. Then I let it be, ensuring that I don't disrupt the air pockets forming on contact with the hot surface.

Once bubbles form, rising to the surface and popping (after about 2 1/2 to 3 minutes), it's time to flip. Shove the spatula under the pancake without hesitation in one quick, fluid motion. If you hesitate, you risk chasing the pancake around the griddle to get the spatula under it. For the most control, I flip the pancake sideways — not toward or away from me. If you're cooking more than one pancake at a time and the flipped pancake slightly overlaps another one, wait about 30 seconds for the newly flipped pancake to set, then use the spatula to scoot it off and away from the one it overlapped. This second side will take less time to cook than the first, about 2 minutes. The edges will be matte and the pancake should spring back when lightly depressed in the center.

And one final note about flipping: Resist the urge to tap the pancake with the spatula after flipping it — this isn't a smash burger! Tapping it equals flattening it, and all the steps you took to ensure a fluffy pancake will be for naught.

### No buttermilk? No problem.

Besides giving the pancakes a nice tang, the acid in the buttermilk helps activate the baking soda, creating fluffy pancakes. The beauty of pancakes is that you can make them using pantry staples. But if you're like me, buttermilk might not be something you generally have on hand. Although thick, rich, store-bought buttermilk is ideal, you have a few options to avoid a special run to the store.

**Vinegar:** You can make buttermilk using whole milk or half-and-half. This method produces a thinner buttermilk than store-bought, but it will certainly work. Just add 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar to a 2-cup measuring cup, then add the milk to the 2-cup line, stirring to incorporate. Let the milk sit for 5 minutes before using.

**Lemon juice:** Add 2 tablespoons of freshly squeezed lemon juice to a 2-cup measuring cup, then add the milk to the 2-cup line, stirring to incorporate. Let the milk sit for 5 minutes before using.

**Greek yogurt:** Add 1/4 cup of water to a 2-cup measuring cup, then fill with plain yogurt to the 2-cup line. Greek yogurt is more acidic than regular, so it will easily activate the baking soda. I like to thin it with water first. You can use regular yogurt if you don't have Greek. Just use 2 tablespoons of water instead of 1/4 cup.

Arambula is the food section art director and designer. She blogs at confessionsofafoodie.me, where the original version of this article was published. Follow her on Instagram: @afotogirl. She can be reached at anita.arambula@sduiontribune.com.