

Are Biscuits and Scones the Same?

 [food52.com/blog/21381-are-biscuits-and-scones-the-same](https://www.food52.com/blog/21381-are-biscuits-and-scones-the-same)

By Emma
Laperruque

January 24, 2018

My early twenties can be broken into three eras: Bagel, Scone, and Biscuit. The first took place, entirely, in an all-you-can-eat dining hall. Mass-scrambled eggs, mystery-vegetable cream cheese. Let's skip ahead:

the scone era

Edinburgh, Scotland; three months. I was studying abroad, which meant eating abroad, which led to two important discoveries: One, I don't like meat pies. And two, I *do* like scones. Even love. In the U.K., they are tall, crusty, and handsome—oversized, some as big as a softball, fluffy and tender, flecked with chewy fruit or funky cheese, served with syrupy jam and clotted cream. During my time abroad, scones were everywhere I went. (Or, I went everywhere scones were.)

Whole Wheat Persimmon Ricotta Scones

the biscuit era

Research Triangle, North Carolina; three and a half years. I worked at **a pie-and-biscuit bakery**, where I made, well, pies and biscuits. Much like scones in Scotland, biscuits are omnipresent in the South, popping up everywhere from mimosa brunches to midnight drive-throughs. They are rarely embellished with mix-ins, but often sandwich-fied (fried chicken, hi). Like scones, biscuits are crusty *and* fluffy, sturdy *and* tender; they're buttery, everyday miracles. And yet, I kept meeting southern folks who insisted that they *didn't like* scones.

“But they're just like biscuits!” I insisted. “Then why don't you just make biscuits?” they countered. Which is fair. Also, a question that asks another question: *What's the difference?*

Head to the index of ***The Joy of Cooking*** and the biscuits entry reads, “see also scones.” The authors even describe scones as “sweet, rich biscuits.” This sentiment is echoed in ***How to Cook Everything***: “Scones are really just ultra-rich biscuits.” *Is a scone just a*

type of biscuit? Is a biscuit a type of scone? Are they different names for the same thing? Let's sort it out.

Cacio e Pepe Biscuits

biscuits vs. scones

The basic baking methods for scones and biscuits are indistinguishable: Start with a wheat flour-based dry mixture composed of leaveners like baking powder or baking soda, salt, and sometimes sugar. Cut in a fat—like butter, lard, or shortening—until the mixture is pebbly. Stir in a liquidy dairy—like buttermilk or cream—until a dough forms. Don't overwork! Drop onto a baking sheet. Or, roll and cut out.

If the templates are identical, it must be the ingredients—and their quantities—that make the difference. Let's stick with *The Joy of Cooking* and compare the core recipes. Both the Buttermilk Biscuits and Classic Scones start with 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups flour, which makes our job easy as pie (which is a whole different story for another day):

- The biscuits call for 2 teaspoons baking powder and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda. The scones call for 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons baking powder but no baking soda. Why? The answer is in the liquid...
- The biscuits call for $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup buttermilk—acidic!—which activates that baking soda. The scone recipe calls for $\frac{1}{3}$ cream—not acidic but higher in fat. So the scones have less liquid, but the recipe *also* calls for 2 large eggs, which equal about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup.
- The biscuits call for 4 to 6 tablespoons butter *or* shortening. The scones call for 8 tablespoons butter—roughly twice the amount.
- The biscuits call for no sugar. The scones call for 1 tablespoon.
- The biscuits are brushed with melted butter or milk. The scones are coated in egg wash, then sprinkled with sugar or salt.
- Both are rolled out. (Biscuits can also be scooped and plopped.) The biscuits are cut with a "biscuit cutter" (round), while the scones are cut into a "classic wedge shape" (triangle) *or* into sticks. (Scones can also be cut into circles or even squares.)

big takeaways

The fat in biscuits, both its type and amount, is flexible; in scones, not so much. The classic liquids used in biscuits and scones differ as well. Unlike biscuits, scones typically include sugar and eggs. Scones' shape is flexible; biscuits, not so much. The final touches also differ.

The best part about knowing all of this? It gives you the freedom—nay, the power!—to play around and bend the biscuit and scone rules, even break them. **Here are a few ways to get started:**

- Adapt the fat in a biscuit recipe. Start by replacing half the butter with shortening, lard, or rendered bacon fat. Or vice versa.
 - Biscuits love buttermilk because it's an acidic dairy product. So call in some other, close-minded friends, like plain yogurt or crème fraîche. If you can find it, try full-fat buttermilk; you'll taste the difference.
 - Same idea for scones: They love cream because it's rich and fatty. So try full-fat yogurt or crème fraîche to impart some tang. (Claire Ptak does just that in ***The Violet Bakery Cookbook*** with her prune and oat scones.)
 - If you're serving biscuits in a sweet context—say, with honey and butter—steal some scone inspo. Add some sugar (anything from a pinch to a few tablespoons) into the dough. Brush the tops with cream (or, better yet, a mix of egg yolk and cream), then sprinkle with raw sugar before baking .
 - If you want to transform biscuits into pseudo-shortcakes, follow the method above, then add a couple egg yolks to the dough.
 - Turn biscuit sandwich ideas into scone mix-ins. Maybe add some diced smoky ham and cheddar. Or crumbled sausage and **pimiento cheese**. Play around and see what you come up with!
- [Upvote](#)
 - [Reply](#)
 - [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Victoria S. February 2, 2018

@Donna: Well, I'm a Brit & therefore biased in favor* of the round scones I grew up eating in England!

* a bilingual Brit

- [Upvote \(1\)](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Donna February 2, 2018

Scones may generally be round in the UK but in America, the triangle rules. Just look at King Arthur's Flours selection of scone pans - not a round one in the bunch!

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)



Sue S February 2, 2018

I use the scone recipe from a very old Farm Journal bread cookbook, that includes both winter and summer versions. Mine are round, and sometimes I use the crinkle edge cutter. I have been told they are the very best by a number of people.

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Victoria S. February 2, 2018

This very interesting article is 100% wrong in one respect: As Julia Garrick pointed out, scones are ALWAYS round. The error is so big that it really needs to be corrected in the article!

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Claire I. February 2, 2018

Actually no. In the UK it's certainly the commonest shape for scones but wedges cut out of a round of scone dough are far from unknown

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Yvonne February 3, 2018

I'm from the UK and my mum makes round scones but my grandma made the large round cut into triangles!

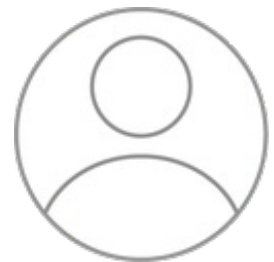
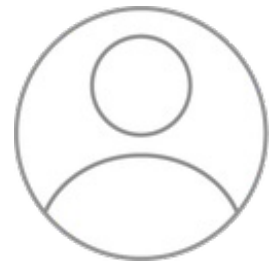
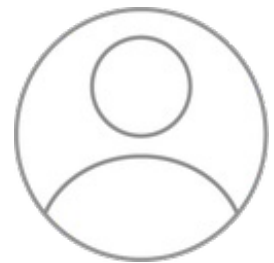
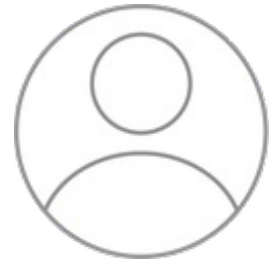
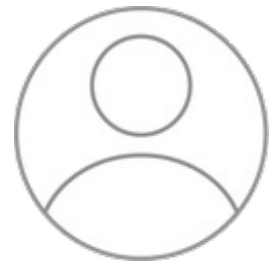
- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Julia G. January 28, 2018

In the UK scones are almost ALWAYS cut in circles and often with a crinkle edge cutter. Triangles are not used for scones at all.

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Lorna J. February 3, 2018



Julia, they're not. Scones *often* come in a triangle cut from a large circle. Mass produced scones are generally round. Simply because of production costs.

I make my own. I make them both ways.

The big circle is best: the less the dough is handled, the lighter and fluffier and higher the cooked scone.

Triangles, generally, would be a home-cook's preference.

Oh. And I live in the UK. In Scotland.

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Yvonne February 3, 2018

Growing up in England I was taught to cut sweet scones with a crinkle edge and savoury with a plain cutter and the Scottish method of a big circle. Now I live in Canada I use all scone shapes including cutting with a knife into squares.

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

AntoniaJames January 24, 2018

A few paper-thin slices of country ham -- what we called "Smithfield ham" growing up in the great Commonwealth of Virginia -- on a biscuit, yes, please. ;o)

- [Upvote](#)
- [Reply](#)
- [Flag Inappropriate](#)

Showing 17 out of 17 Comments

