



Maine Blueberry Grunt

AT A DINER in Maine, I spied an oddly named dessert—blueberry grunt—on the menu. The waitress's description, stewed blueberries with dumplings, didn't exactly sell the dish, nor did its sloppy appearance, but when I found out that a grunt is made entirely on the stovetop, I was intrigued.

Back in the test kitchen, I learned that most grunts start by stewing fresh berries in water, sugar, and cinnamon. You then top the fruit mixture with dollops of dough, cover the pot, and cook until the dumplings are done. The technique is attributed to Maria Rendell, who popularized the idea of cooking sweetened dough in water in her 1807 book *A New System of Domestic Cookery*.

Grunt filling is typically soupy (recipes don't call for thickeners) because it is meant to soak into the dumplings. My tasters and I felt the need to break tradition as we found the fillings bland and the dumplings too soggy. When I cooked the berries to a jam-like consistency, the tasters missed the essence of fresh fruit. As a compromise, I cooked half the berries into jam and then stirred in the rest of the berries before adding the dumpling dollops. A little cornstarch (1 teaspoon) tightened the filling without making it too thick.

To lighten the dumplings, I replaced the milk with buttermilk, which reacts with baking soda. However, the tops of the dumplings were strangely soggy. The cause was condensation dripping from

the inside of the pot lid. To remedy this, I placed a dish towel under the lid during cooking to absorb condensation. I sprinkled cinnamon sugar on the cooked dumplings before serving for a final burst of flavor and crunch. At last—a grunt that can be known for more than just its funny name.

—Cali Rich

MAINE BLUEBERRY GRUNT

SERVES 12

Use fresh blueberries; frozen berries will make the filling watery.

FILLING

- 2½ pounds (8 cups) blueberries**
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**
- 2 tablespoons water**
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch**

TOPPING

- ¾ cup buttermilk**
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2¼ cups (11¼ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**

- 1½ teaspoons baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**

1. FOR THE FILLING: Cook 4 cups blueberries, sugar, water, lemon zest, and cinnamon in Dutch oven over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until mixture is thick and jam-like, 10 to 12 minutes. Whisk lemon juice and cornstarch together in small bowl, then stir into blueberry mixture. Add remaining 4 cups blueberries and cook until heated through, about 1 minute; remove pot from heat, cover, and keep warm.

2. FOR THE TOPPING: Combine buttermilk, melted butter, and vanilla in 2-cup liquid measuring cup. Whisk flour, 6 tablespoons sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in large bowl. Slowly stir buttermilk mixture into flour mixture until dough forms. Evenly dollop golf ball-size dough pieces onto berry mixture (you should have 14 pieces). Wrap lid of pot with clean dish towel (keeping towel away from heat source) and cover pot. Simmer until biscuits have doubled in size and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 16 to 22 minutes.

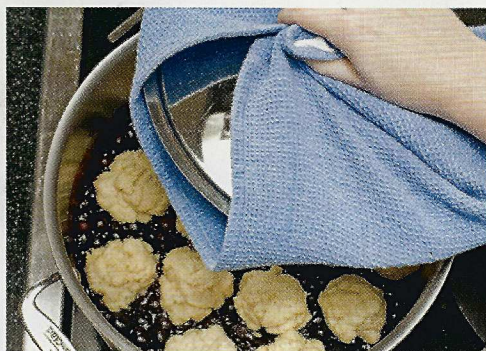
3. Combine cinnamon and remaining 2 tablespoons sugar in bowl. Remove lid and sprinkle biscuits with cinnamon sugar. Serve immediately.

SECRETS TO GREAT GRUNT

Here's how we get a biscuit topping that's light and fluffy (and a little bit crunchy) rather than wet and dense.



1. Evenly dollop golf ball-size pieces of dough over warm filling.



2. Wrap lid with clean dish towel (it will absorb condensation) and cover pot.



3. Sprinkle cinnamon sugar over steamed dumplings.