

## Get cracking

### Homemade crackers are easy — and fun

By Amy Halloran  
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Crackers are easy to love. They travel well and sturdily tote snacks from plate to mouth. Fish spreads, nut butters, and old reliable cheese sitting pretty on an edible utensil — what's not to like?

#### Featured recipes

-  [Potato, Dill, and Onion Crackers](#)
-  [Whole-Wheat Peanut-Butter Crackers](#)
-  [Lora Brody's Multi-Seed Crackerbread](#)

Well, plenty. However wonderful, crackers get complicated when you consider nutrition, packaging, and cost.

Most crackers are processed with such questionable ingredients as trans fats, used to stretch shelf life. Most — even the healthiest — come wrapped in plastic sleeves and cardboard boxes. And most cost at least a few dollars a box — absurd for what's little more than flour, water, oil, salt, and spices, and especially so when that \$5 box is consumed by my kids in five minutes flat.

I also tend to find most commercial crackers both too sweet and too oily. High fat and sugar contents should be reserved for cookies, which I heartily enjoy. Yet fat-free cracker alternatives like rice cakes and Ryvita can seem more like punishment than food.

One afternoon last year, when the cupboards boasted no boxes of ready-made treats and my kids were begging for snacks, I remembered reading that crackers were easy to make. I dug through my cookbooks and turned up a few cracker recipes calling for ingredients I already had in the house.



*Homemade crackers are easy to make.*

Perfect. My kids and I spent the next few hours mixing and rolling, then baking and snacking. The loosely squarish potato-dill crackers and their similarly unshaped sesame-crinker cousins made perfect little beds for snuggling sardines or Cheddar cheese.

I stored my freshly baked and cooled batches of crackers in plastic containers or glass jars with tight lids. The crackers traveled well, both to school lunch — crackers with cheese and carrots or celery pleases even my picky five-year-old — and to holiday parties, where guests begged for the recipes.

My youngest son loves plain cracker bread, and my eldest adores cornmeal crackers spiced up with smoked paprika. Me? I love that I can control the ingredients and can build to suit dietary needs or tastes. No dairy? No problem. And hold the fennel seeds, please!

#### What's in a name?

The **Bent** company in Massachusetts stakes claim to manufacturing the first "cracker" in 1801, a decade after a baker dubbed some overcooked biscuits "crackers" because of the cracking sounds produced in the oven as they burnt.

Crackers are willing to travel a variety of taste routes, accompanying most anything in the spice drawer, herbs from the garden (dried or fresh), and all kinds of nuts and seeds. Using a pasta machine to help roll the dough is advertised in some recipes, but I found that a pastry cloth and a good rolling pin work very well.

You'd be hard put to make an expensive cracker. This gives you more money to spend on, say, local cheeses to serve with your homemade crackers — which are also the perfect foil for other homemade edibles, such as chutneys and pepper sauces.

An added bonus was discovering something fun and unusual to give as holiday presents besides our usual cookies. My sons and I decorated boxes, filled them with crackers, and presented them (with a selection of cheeses) as gifts. This year I plan to go the cracker-and-cheese route one better by adding another homemade condiment to the package: mustards.

*Amy Halloran lives in upstate New York with her two sons, husband, and nine chickens. They garden*

*their six city lots to have food for most seasons.*

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