

# Use this method for any crisp

Heat the oven to 375°F.

Serves eight.

## Make a topping

Use the Crunchy Crisp Topping recipe (or one of the variations) at far right and refrigerate.

## Prepare 6 cups of fruit

Choose one or two fruits and cut each into even-size pieces: ½-inch pieces for firmer fruit, ¾-inch pieces for tender fruit. Put the fruit in a bowl.

## Adjust the sweetness

Taste the fruit and sprinkle on 2 tablespoons to ⅓ cup sugar. For less ripe or tart fruit, use more sugar; for sweet, ripe fruit, use less.

## Add the thickener

In a small dish, dissolve 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon cornstarch in 1 tablespoon lemon juice. For juicier fruit, such as berries, use the greater amount of cornstarch. For denser fruits like apples and pears, use the lesser amount. Pour over the fruit.

## Add optional flavorings

Choose one or two spices, zests, or extracts. Gently toss into the fruit.

## Assemble and start baking

Pour the fruit mixture into an 8- or 9-inch square (or similar-capacity) glass or ceramic baking dish. Set the pan on a baking sheet to catch overflowing juices. Top the fruit with half of the topping (refrigerate the other half) and bake for 20 minutes.

## Finish baking

Sprinkle the remaining topping over the crisp and continue baking until the fruit is tender when pierced with a knife, the topping is crisp, and the juices are bubbling, another 15 to 35 minutes, depending on the fruit (apples take more time; berries take less). Let cool for 20 to 30 minutes. Serve warm.

## FRUIT OPTIONS

*These fruit are good alone or mixed:*

- ◆ Apples and pears: Peel, core, cut into ½-inch slices.
- ◆ Peaches, nectarines, plums, and apricots: Pit and cut into ¾-inch slices.

*These fruit are best mixed with each other or with one of the fruits above:*

- ◆ Strawberries: Stem, core, and quarter or halve, depending on size.
- ◆ Cherries: Stem, pit, and leave whole.
- ◆ Blueberries, raspberries, blackberries: Leave whole.

## FLAVOR OPTIONS

*Here are approximate amounts for some flavorings:*

- ◆ Grated lemon or orange zest: 1 to 2 teaspoons.
- ◆ Ground cinnamon: ½ teaspoon.
- ◆ Grated or ground nutmeg: ⅛ teaspoon.
- ◆ Grated fresh ginger: 1 to 2 teaspoons.
- ◆ Vanilla: 1 teaspoon extract or the seeds from 2 inches of a vanilla bean.
- ◆ Almond extract: ½ teaspoon.
- ◆ Dried cherries, dried cranberries, or raisins: ½ cup soaked in hot water for 10 minutes and drained.

may be sweeter (or more tart) than you think, and too much sugar will deaden its flavor.

I know some people are adamant that fruit crisps need no added thickener, but I like to give some extra body to the thin fruit juices. I use cornstarch dissolved in lemon juice because it cooks clear and has a lighter taste and texture than flour or tapioca. The amount to add depends on the fruit. Firm fruit like apples and pears need very little—about 1 teaspoon cornstarch to 6 cups fruit. Berries fall on the other end of the spectrum.

**Use restraint when mixing in spices, extracts, zests, or dried fruit.** These ingredients can add an interesting dimension, but they're all optional. You might be tempted to throw in a little bit of everything, but I recommend limiting yourself to no more than one or two add-ins. Too many ingredients muddy the flavor and overwhelm the fruit.

**The best types of baking pan for crisps are glass or ceramic** because they're nonreactive and they heat evenly, allowing the fruit to cook gently without burning around the edges, a problem I've had with metal pans. Glass and ceramic are also attractive serving vessels. I use an 8- or 9-inch-square pan, but its shape is less important than its capacity, which should hold 6 cups of cut-up fruit in about a 1½-inch layer. You could also divide the fruit into small ramekins for individual crisps—just remember that the cooking time will be shorter.

## All that's left is to top it and bake

The toppings for crisps can be made ahead and refrigerated or frozen, but you're not gaining that much time by doing so. It only takes one bowl and about five minutes to crumble together a topping, hardly a draining effort. The butter should be slightly softened, not frozen nor soft and melting.

For the perfect buttery, crispy, crumbly topping, I use an easy-to-remember formula that's also wonderfully versatile. It starts with 1 cup flour, ½ cup butter, ½ cup dark brown sugar, and ¼ cup white sugar; you can then add oatmeal or cornmeal and nuts or spices to vary its texture and flavor.

**Bake the crumbly topping in two installments.** The topping is my favorite part of the crisp, so I blanket it on thickly. But if it's too thick, the bottom layer of topping doesn't really get crisp. The solution I've devised is to sprinkle on only half the topping, bake for 20 minutes, sprinkle on the rest, and then bake until done, another 15 to 35 minutes. This way, the first half gets a head start on browning and crisping, so you get less of a gooey layer next to the fruit.



**Individual crisps make serving a breeze. Just tuck the fruit into small ramekins, sprinkle on a topping, and bake for a shorter time.**

The total baking time for crisps depends on which fruit you've chosen and, to some extent, your personal preferences. Denser fruit like apples and pears need longer time than juicier fruit like berries, which break down quite quickly. If you like the fruit slices to retain some texture and shape rather than be soft like a compote, start checking the crisp on the earlier side; insert a knife to check the fruit for tenderness.

Crisps are best served the same day they're made, as the topping tends to absorb the fruit's juices and become soggy. If you fancy it for breakfast, however, you can reheat day-old crisp in a 400°F oven.

## Crunchy Crisp Topping

*Yields enough for one crisp.*

This is my version of the classic fruit crisp topping. It can be made up to a month ahead and frozen; use it straight out of the freezer.

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- Pinch salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon or ⅛ teaspoon ground or grated nutmeg (optional)
- 8 tablespoons slightly softened unsalted butter, cut into pieces

Combine the flour, both sugars, salt, and cinnamon or nutmeg, if using, in a medium bowl. Rub in the butter with your fingertips until it's well blended and the mixture crumbles coarsely; it should hold together when you pinch it. Refrigerate until needed.

### OATMEAL TOPPING VARIATION

Adding oatmeal makes a more voluminous topping with a rustic, crumbly texture. Add **1 cup old-fashioned oats** to the master recipe.

### CORNMEAL TOPPING VARIATION

Cornmeal adds some unexpected crunch but makes the topping a bit less crumbly. Add **¼ cup cornmeal** to the master recipe.

### NUT TOPPING VARIATION

After rubbing in the butter, add **⅓ cup chopped walnuts, pecans, or hazelnuts, or sliced almonds** to any of the recipes above.

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## For the best crisp, follow these tips



**Make the topping first so it's ready to go.** Slightly softened butter rubs in easier; the topping should be well combined and crumble in clumps.



**Sweeten the fruit to your taste.** If you like sweet crisps or if the fruit is especially tart, sprinkle on extra sugar.



**Toss in extra flavors for interest, but stick to just one or two optional ingredients so the fruit flavor shines through.**



**Bake the topping in two stages so it stays crisp.** Cover the fruit with half the topping, bake for 20 minutes, and then sprinkle on the rest.