



BEST OF BAKE-OFF

C O O K B O O K

350 Recipes from America's Favorite Cooking Contest

By The Pillsbury Company



Clarkson Potter/Publishers New York Front Cover Photograph: Triple Espresso Brownies page 230

Pages 2 to 3: Finalists at the 12th Bake-Off® Contest in 1960 prepare their recipes in the Grand Ballroom of the Statler Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C.

Page 4: Macadamia Fudge Torte page 271.

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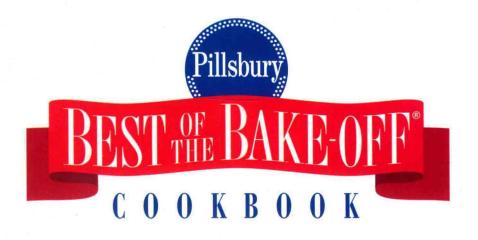
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Introduction

The year was 1949. "Some Enchanted Evening" was the song on everyone's lips. President Harry Truman had a plan to lead the world to peace. Soldiers had returned from the war in the Pacific and Europe. Women at home retreated from their wartime jobs and were busy planning, giving birth to or raising what would come to be known as the Baby-Boom Generation. Wartime sugar rationing had finally ended—and home cooks celebrated by turning out a flood of cookies, cakes, pies and brownies. There was a spirit of celebration in the air—and why not? The nation had moved from a period of terrible adversity to incredible prosperity. At Pillsbury headquarters, President Philip Pillsbury felt like celebrating, too.

What was missing from the life of devoted, industrious home cooks? Public recognition and glamour for their culinary talents. And where was

Eleanor Pillsbury awarded Mari Petrelli the Grand Prize for her Golden Gate Snack Bread at the 17th Bake-Off[®] Contest in 1966. the most glamorous place in the country? The ball-room of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. So, what if one hundred of the greatest home cooks were gathered, treated like royalty and awarded for their efforts? Wouldn't that bring excitement and respect to kitchens from the shores of Florida to the mountains of Alaska? The competition was announced, an avalanche of entries arrived and Pillsbury's Bake-Off® Contest was born.

Those first events were a sight to behold. Contestants from the four corners of the country and from every walk of life were showered with luxury and told that the quiet work that they did daily—the cooking, the baking, the serving, the planning, the attention to detail—was appreciated and esteemed. Many contestants in those first years had never been on a train or stayed in a hotel before. And they certainly had never met the likes of former first lady and nationally syndicated columnist Eleanor Roosevelt or television and radio personality Art Linkletter, who were at that first Bake-Off®

Contest, then known as the Grand National Recipe and Baking Contest. The contestants were treated to breakfast in bed, a luncheon that included pheasant under glass and a level of pampering formerly reserved for captains of industry and stage stars. In retrospect, the Bake-Off® Contest may be read as a sign of the changes that would transform American society over the next forty years. No longer would home cooks' accomplishments be taken for granted now that the creator of a fabulous recipe was eligible to earn thousands of dollars for his or her efforts.

Today women and men find recognition in so many ways-working, raising their children, volunteering-that you might think that the excitement of the Bake-Off® would have lessened. But it hasn't. When the contestants parade onto the Bake-Off® floor to the strains of "When the Saints Go Marching In," even hardened journalists report tingles down the spine. Why all this emotion? Because the Bake-Off® Contest is an American institution, because it means so very much to the contestants and, above all, because it is an achievement of national stature, accomplished by real, average Americans who have won in an absolutely upright, thorough and principled contest. From the very beginning the contest has been conducted with the utmost integrity, and the scrupulous selection process and earnest competition continues today.

How do you get to the Bake-Off® Contest? First, cooks throughout the country fill out their entry blanks, which they receive in Pillsbury products, through the mail, in special Pillsbury displays in grocery stores, in Pillsbury publications such as *Classic Cookbooks* and at Pillsbury special promotional events hosted by past finalists. Keys to a topnotch entry are:

- 1. Follow the contest rules, paying attention to deadlines and making sure the recipe is original.
- 2. Be specific when listing ingredients, measurements, pan sizes, cooking temperatures and preparation method.

After that, chances for a winning entry can be increased by thinking about a recipe's popular appeal: that is, would family cooks nationwide be able to reproduce your results? A dish's creativity, attractiveness and reasonable preparation time will also increase chances of success.

The entries go directly to an independent judging agency, which screens all the recipes, first eliminating those recipes that fail to follow the rules. The next step: removing all identifying information, such as names or addresses, from the selected recipes, and coding them so that the screening will be completely anonymous. The coded recipes are then forwarded to Pillsbury for kitchen testing.

A staff of Bake-Off® home economists carefully reads through the recipes, selecting those that are the most interesting and creative without requiring unusual equipment or ingredients. Those recipes then get a workout in the famous Pillsbury test kitchens. Each recipe is prepared and evaluated by a panel of home economists for taste, appearance, creativity, ease of preparation, general appeal and appropriate use of Pillsbury products. Recipes approved by the panel continue through the evaluation process to a team of researchers that examines each recipe for originality. Recipes are compared to a computer database and a large library of food publications, to make sure that the recipe isn't too similar to one that has been previously published. The recipe must feature several significant changes from a published recipe to be considered original. Testing



continues until the 100 top recipes shine through.

The delightful task of notifying finalists comes next. Finalists are often overwhelmed by the news, some crying tears of joy. Many finalists have been entering recipes for years. One woman had entered every year from 1949 through 1988, until she finally won. The news of their success is thrilling for everyone. Next, forms and releases are completed, and travel arrangements are made. Some Bake-Off® details are taken care of long before cooks even consider sending in their entries. For example, the site of the Bake-Off® Contest is chosen years in advance, since so few hotels are able to accommodate this huge event. Pillsbury also arranges for the ranges, refrigerators and other technical needs months

before entries arrive. A team of Pillsbury employees begins to compile grocery, equipment and utensil lists for each finalist, checking and double-checking to make sure everything is accounted for. A few days before the contest, the giant list of groceries is purchased, the 100 Bake-Off® kitchens are set up and excitement builds to a feverish pitch.

What's the typical weekend of a Bake-Off® finalist like? On the Saturday before the awards announcement, finalists arrive from all over the country and are greeted by Pillsbury representatives at the airport. Finalists check into the hotel,

Category winners Debbie Freeman (right) and Pamela Kenney (left) congratulate Grand Prize Winner Mary Ann Tyndal at the 36th Bake-Off® Contest.



begin to meet their fellow contestants and are treated to a gala dinner. The next morning, after a luxurious breakfast, contestants go through the Bake-Off® orientation, where they find out what will happen on contest day and get a chance to see the ballroom where the competition will take place. The rest of the day is given over to sightseeing and a celebratory dinner and entertainment. The friendships formed at the Bake-Off® Contest are often lifelong. Former contestants often write to Pillsbury with news of their Bake-Off® friends' whereabouts, and some "round-robin" letters

involving Bake-Off® winners have been going for several decades. The big day then arrives and many contestants wake up to butterflies in their stomach because so much depends on the next few hours' work.

After an early breakfast, the contestants line up four-abreast and march into a ballroom full of kitchens, cameras, media people and Bake-Off® staffers to the strains of "When the Saints Go

Chairman Emeritus Philip Pillsbury leads contestants in the "Grand March" at the 31st Bake-Off® Contest in 1984. Marching In." The contestants have from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M. to prepare their recipe twice: once for the judges and once to be photographed. Sweet and savory aromas fill the ballroom as reporters, television crews and celebrities mingle with the Bake-Off® contestants. Contestants share samples, mug for cameras and put the finishing touches on the dishes that are brought to the sequestered judges. The rest of the day is spent unwinding, topped off with a festive dinner that allows contestants to revel in the day's excitement. The next morning brings the moment all have been waiting for—the awards ceremony.

The Bake-Off® Contest has been going strong for almost fifty years. All agree it is because of one thing—integrity. The scrupulousness of the judging process and the original idea behind the contest—promoting wholesome family meals—have combined to create an American institution of utmost integrity.

Much has changed in the Bake-Off® Contest over the years: For example, the only ingredient required for early Bake-Off® recipes was at least one-half cup of flour. Today there are many qualifying products; soups, salads and entrees are welcome additions to the Bake-Off® table. New companies to the Pillsbury family, such as Green Giant, have prompted the introduction of products like frozen vegetables to the list of eligible ingredients.

Many things, however, have remained the same, including the rigor of the selection and judging process, the impressiveness of the contestants and their recipes and the joy that surrounds each Bake-Off® Contest. That's why the Bake-Off® event has always produced a true cross-section of Americans, along with a personal glimpse of the food they cook.

Bake-Off® recipes are special because they are a reflection of how Americans are living and eating. These are not recipes created by a master chef, or the thoughts of a single company, but are the accumulated wisdom and experience of hundreds of thousands of cooks. The Bake-Off® recipes are a testament to how, what and sometimes even why Americans cook.

Pillsbury: Best of the Bake-Off® Cookbook is a comprehensive collection of the most popular Bake-Off® recipes, including all of the Grand Prize-winning recipes from every contest. Most of the recipes will look familiar to Bake-Off® Contest followers, although many have been updated to conform to currently available products or to eliminate any food-safety concerns that the original recipes might have raised. These pages hold the benefit of all these cooks' experiences and accumulated cooking wisdom: their practical time-saving tips, their heirloom recipes, their innovative or improvised ideas, their diversity of background and taste and, above all, their prize-winning recipes.