

benne wafers

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Benne Wafers

A thin, brittle, caramelised sesame wafer from the Carolina Lowcountry. *Benne* is the Wolof and Bambara word for sesame, and the seed came to South Carolina with enslaved West Africans, who grew it in garden plots and pressed it for oil. The wafer is one of the small number of American cookies whose ancestry is demonstrably African rather than European, and Charleston has sold it commercially since the 1930s.

What makes it work

- **Toast the sesame seeds first, and watch them.** Six to eight minutes in a dry pan over medium heat, shaken constantly, until they smell nutty and turn the colour of straw. Untoasted benne wafers taste of paste.
- **Brown sugar and a very small amount of flour.** The ratio is closer to a praline than to a cookie — about 100 g flour to 250 g sugar — which is why they spread to lace and set to glass.
- **Half a teaspoon of batter, spaced 8 cm apart.** They triple. Six to a tray.
- **Pull them off the parchment only when fully cold,** or they fold.
- **Salt matters.** A wafer this sweet needs a real 4 g of salt in the batch and is often finished with a flake on top.

Ingredients

Makes about 60 small wafers.

- 150 g sesame seeds
- 115 g unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 250 g light brown sugar
- 1 [egg](#)
- 1 tsp vanilla — see [Pure vanilla extract](#)
- 100 g all-purpose flour
- 2 g baking powder
- 4 g fine salt

Method

Toast the sesame seeds in a dry skillet until fragrant and pale gold. Tip them out to cool — they keep cooking in the pan.

Whisk the melted butter and brown sugar smooth, then the egg and vanilla. Fold in the flour, baking powder and salt, then the cooled seeds. The batter is loose.

Drop half-teaspoons onto parchment, 8 cm apart, six per tray. Bake **175 °C / 350 °F for 8–10 minutes**, until evenly caramel brown right to the centre. Pale middles mean they will be chewy rather than brittle.

Cool completely on the tray before lifting.

Notes

- **Charleston serves them with sherry**, and they are as much a cocktail biscuit as a dessert one. A savoury version — sesame, cheese and cayenne — is the same city's other benne recipe.
- Humidity ruins them within hours. Store with a desiccant in a rigid tin.
- The seed is worth sourcing properly: heirloom benne, revived by Carolina growers, tastes markedly different from commodity sesame. See [Nuts And Seeds](#).

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