Cornmeal Mush

Cornmeal Mush is an old fashioned meal item once popular in northern Indiana, and probably other places. Usually eaten for breakfast as the main course or a side. Pour syrup over it as it comes from the frying pan.

Ingredients

SMALL batch

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 3 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt (Salt is optional. Feel free to decrease amount or to skip salt altogether)
- 1/2 tablespoon butter* (or butter substitute for dairy fee) – Optional

LARGE batch

- 3 cups yellow cornmeal
- 9 cups water
- 1-1/2 teaspoon salt (Salt is optional. Feel free to decrease amount or to skip salt altogether)
- 1-1/2 tablespoon butter* (or butter substitute for dairy fee) – Optional

Instructions

1. In a medium saucepan, heat water to boiling. Reduce heat to medium; stir in salt and cornmeal. Cook, stirring regularly, until mixture is thick.
2. Spoon cornmeal mixture into a lightly greased 9×5 inch loaf pan (2 or 3 pans for large batch). Cover and refrigerate overnight.
3. In the morning, slice cornmeal mush into 1 inch wide slices. Cook in vegetable oil that covers the bottom of the pan (Alternate: use melted butter) until golden brown on both sides.

Culinary Tradition
USA (traditional)
My Rating (out of 5 stars)
★★★★★

HISTORICAL NOTES: *[1.* ***SOURCES:***

- *Extra Crispy website,* "Why Fried Cornmeal Mush Means So Much to the Midwest," viewed December 30, 2019 (https://www.myrecipes.com/extracrispy/why-mush-means-so-much-to-the-midwest)
- CivilWarTalk website, viewed December 30, 2019 (https://civilwartalk.com/threads/corn-meal-mush.86609/)]

You will find various theories for the origin of such a generic, simple, and popular food as fried cornmeal mush. A few notes follow:

- One of the early foods enjoyed by early colonists and settlers to America was corn meal mush. The newcomers learned to make and eat this from the native American Indians. Indians had been grinding corn for centuries making all kinds of dishes.
- Hot cereal was known for years in other parts of the world. It went under various names, as porridge, hasty pudding and lobiolly. Thus, during the decades of European settlement of America, mush made from cornmeal became the usual breakfast and supper dish. People served it with butter, maple syrup, milk, or meat drippings. Mush with drippings was the ancestor of today's grits with red eye gravy or sausage gravy.

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  WW I poster for eating cornmeal mush to promote the war effort

In 1918, the US Food Administration circulated a poster to promote WWI-era food rationing that read “Little Americans. Do Your Bit. Eat Oatmeal – Corn meal mush – Hominy – other corn cereals – and rice with milk. Save the Wheat for our Soldiers. Leave Nothing On Your Plate.”

- The breakfast staple even gets a mention in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie,* which the family fries and eats alongside prairie-chicken hash.

- Another version of Cornmeal Mush. This one is from “Blue and Grey Cookery” by Hugh and Judy Gowan, page 20.

  1 lb sausage
  3 cups water
  1 cup cornmeal
  2 teaspoons salt
  1/4 teaspoon pepper

  Brown the sausage in skillet and pour off the fat. Add 2 cups of water. Heat to boiling. Combine cornmeal, salt,

pepper and remaining water. Add to the boiling liquid and stir constantly. Place on low heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir this frequently. Pour into a greased loaf pan and chill. Cut into 1/2 inch slices and fry in hot fat until brown.

- It's relatively difficult to follow fried mush back to its origins, given that the simple mixture of cornmeal and water doesn't lend itself well to being a traceable, preserved recipe. Various parts of Africa and the Caribbean have their own versions of the starchy dish—Kenya has *ugali*, St. Croix has *fungi*—and America has seen corn pone, cornbread, spoonbread, and countless other cornmeal products. Most historians guess that the dish traveled over to America as a result of the slave trade. Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, described the horrendous conditions under which slaves were kept: *"Our corn meal mush, which was our only regular if not all-sufficing diet, when sufficiently cooled from the cooking, was placed in a large tray or trough."*

- Jaxon, the most recognizable brand of cornmeal mush, linked the frugal staple to the Midwest. In 1896, Cyrus Jackson thought the cornmeal mush made by his wife, Theresa, could be quite popular in their hometown of Indianapolis. They started selling the product to local small groceries, and by 1924, the family business expanded to Dayton, Ohio, where the mush is still made today. Somewhere along the way, Amish and Mennonite communities in the region picked the dish up as their own, and where became very popular.

FOOTNOTES: