

National Baking Soda Day

Did you know that December 30 is National Baking Soda Day? When most people think of baking soda, we think of using it for baking or absorbing odors. Baking soda, also known as sodium bicarbonate and bicarbonate of soda, is a white powder with a naturally alkaline (base) chemical composition. When combined with an acidic ingredient such as lemon juice, cream of tartar, or buttermilk, the reaction creates carbon dioxide, which causes the baked good to leaven or, in other words, rise.

Baking soda can expire in a short amount of time (in as little as three months). If you try to use expired baking soda in a recipe, the leavening will not work as intended and you'll likely end up with a flat, dense baked good. So, how do you know if your soda is fresh? It's easy! Test baking soda by placing 2 tablespoons of white vinegar in a small bowl and add 1 teaspoon baking soda. If it fizzes immediately, it's still fresh! If nothing happens, throw away the baking soda and buy a fresh box.

Baking soda begins to work as soon as it touches the liquid, so it is essential to bake items that are only leavened with baking soda as soon as the batter or dough is mixed together. The longer you let it sit, you'll notice a decrease in the leavening effect.

These are a few examples are recipes that use just baking soda as its leavener, and I've included that the acid that's used to activate that base!:

- Snickerdoodles (acid: cream of tartar)
- Texas Sheet Cake (acid: sour cream and natural cocoa)
- Irish Soda Bread (acid: cream of tartar and buttermilk)
- Soft and Chewy Gingersnap Cookies (acid: molasses)

When modern baking soda was introduced commercially, it changed baking in America forever. More affordable and easier to produce than cream of tartar, baking was more accessible to all Americans.

Over time, more culinary uses for baking soda have been developed, and its edible uses are not limited to baking. One use is brine shrimp with salt and baking soda, giving the shrimp a crisp texture and a complex flavor related to cooked, browned foods. Adding baking soda to sliced onions also creates faster browning and onions that will caramelize quickly, but be aware of the amount of baking soda used because it can impact the flavor and should not be used to speed cooking in all recipes.

Adding baking soda can also help balance acidity when cooking with canned tomatoes. Adding a quarter teaspoon of baking soda to a can of tomatoes can neutralize the acid without impacting flavor or texture.

Baking soda can also be used to benefit our health and homes. Some examples include:

- Treating heartburn—baking soda has neutralizing properties that can help treat heartburn by neutralizing stomach acid. To try it, dissolve one teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of cold water and drink the mixture slowly.
- Mouthwash—even has antibacterial and antimicrobial properties, which improve overall oral hygiene and health.
- Deodorant—naturally prevents bacteria in sweat which causes odor
- Kitchen cleaner—baking soda mixed with vinegar or lemon juice can help prevent the growth of mold and bacteria.
- Whitening agent for laundry—the alkali properties naturally help remove acid in stains when dissolved in water.
- Pesticide remover for fruits and vegetables—soaking produce in a baking soda and water solution for 15 minutes will remove all signs of external pesticide residues.
- Oil and grease fire extinguisher—baking soda reacts with the heat to produce carbon dioxide, suffocating the small cooking fire.
- Homemade weed killer—the high sodium content of baking soda will kill weeds in areas like cracks in driveways and sidewalks. Please do not use it in gardens or flowerbeds because it will seep into other areas, harming other plants.
- Soothe itchy skin from bee stings, bug bites, or sunburns—add 1 to 2 cups of baking soda to a lukewarm bath and soak irritated skin thoroughly. Alternatively, create a paste with baking soda and drops of water and apply to the impacted area.

Baking soda is more than just an ingredient for baking desserts. It is a household staple with health and household uses for everyday life. It is versatile, inexpensive, and easy to find. It is always a good idea to keep baking soda on hand in your home.

(Sources: www.eatingwell.com; www.foodnetwork.com; www.healthline.com; www.serious eats.com)