Ritz crackers: a bite of the good life since 1934

From the crackers.biz wiki

Ritz crackers were introduced by Nabisco in 1934. The name was chosen by employee Sydney Stern to offer people living through the Great Depression a bite of the good life. The original cracker is a round, buttery tasting disc about 46mm across, with a scalloped edge and seven holes that let steam escape in baking. Ritz is now owned by Mondel?z.

A little luxury in hard times

In 1934 America was deep in the Great Depression, and the National Biscuit Company, Nabisco, launched a new cracker. Wikipedia records that the name was chosen by a Nabisco employee, Sydney Stern, who picked Ritz because it appealed to people enduring the privations of the Depression by offering them a bite of the good life. The Ritz hotels were a byword for glamour, and a cheap, buttery tasting cracker with a grand name was exactly the kind of small luxury people could still afford.

It worked. Ritz became one of the best known crackers in the world, and it is now owned by Mondel?z International, the group that also owns Oreo, whose own New York story is in our Oreo guide.

What makes a Ritz a Ritz

The original Ritz is instantly recognisable:

- **Round**, about 46mm across.
- **Seven holes**, arranged in a neat pattern.
- **A finely scalloped edge.**
- **A light, flaky, buttery tasting bite**, a little sweet and a little salty.

Those seven holes are not decoration. Wikipedia explains that they allow steam to escape during baking, preventing air pockets and giving a uniform, consistent texture. Crackers are baked very fast in very hot ovens, and without holes the steam inside would puff the dough into uneven bubbles. Many crackers and biscuits have holes for the same reason, which is called docking; we explain the process in how cream crackers are made.

Ritz in Britain

In Britain, Ritz sits in a slightly unusual place. It is savoury enough for the cheeseboard, but buttery and moreish enough to eat by the handful, which makes it the favourite cracker of many children and the secret vice of many adults. It is a party staple, a lunchbox staple and the cracker most likely to vanish from the bowl before the cheese even arrives.

On our shelf:

- Ritz Original.
- Ritz cheese flavoured.
- Ritz Breaks lunchbox multipack.

Wikipedia lists many other varieties sold in Europe over the years, from peanut butter and roasted vegetable to garlic butter, sour cream and onion, and salt and vinegar.

The smaller box

Ritz has also had a small moment in the shrinkflation story. Wikipedia records that in May 2024 200g boxes were replaced with 150g boxes while the price stayed the same. The crackers themselves did not change, only the number in the box, but it caught the attention of plenty of shoppers.

How to eat Ritz crackers

- **With cheese.** Ritz is excellent with a mild Cheddar or a soft cream cheese, though its buttery flavour can compete with delicate cheeses; our cracker and cheese guide explains why plainer crackers suit brie.
- **As canapés.** Top with smoked salmon and cream cheese, pâté, or a slice of salami for an instant party plate.
- **As a sandwich.** Two Ritz with a slice of cheese between them is a classic after school snack.
- **With soup.** Crumble a few over tomato soup instead of croutons.
- **As a crunchy topping.** Crushed Ritz mixed with melted butter makes a golden, crunchy topping for baked dishes such as macaroni cheese.

Why a buttery cracker works

Most cheeseboard crackers are plain on purpose, but Ritz takes the opposite approach. Its rich, slightly sweet, buttery taste makes it satisfying on its own, which is why it is eaten as a snack as often as with cheese. That richness comes from fat in the dough and from the thin, flaky layers formed as it bakes, and its gentle sweetness balances the salt on top. It is the reason a Ritz tastes like a treat rather than a base, and the reason a box rarely lasts long once opened.

Crackers in the American kitchen

In America, where Ritz was born, crackers have long been part of home cooking as well as snacking. Crushed crackers are used as a crunchy coating, a binder in savoury dishes and a topping for baked casseroles, and Ritz, with its buttery flavour, is a favourite for all three. The same ideas work perfectly well in a British kitchen: next time a recipe calls for breadcrumbs on top of a bake, try crushed Ritz mixed with a little melted butter instead.

Ritz and its cousins

If you like Ritz, you will probably like the other light, buttery snack crackers on our shelf. Jacob's TUC is a close relative, salty and flaky, and there is a TUC twin pack for sharing. Jacob's Baked Cheddars bring the cheese with them, and Carr's Melts are a richer, more grown up buttery cracker. For India's favourite salty biscuit, Monaco, and its British equivalents, see Indian biscuits and their British cousins.

Crackers for a party

A bowl of Ritz is the easiest party food there is, but a mixed plate goes further. Put Ritz and TUC out for snacking, water biscuits and oatcakes for the cheese, and a few seeded crackers for the adventurous. Everything you need is on our crackers and crispbreads shelf, and the classic cheeseboard crackers are covered in Carr's water biscuits.

Diet and allergy notes

Ritz crackers contain wheat and may contain milk and other allergens, depending on the variety. Recipes differ between countries and change over time, so always check the pack in your hand.

Quick facts

Launched	1934, by Nabisco
Named by	Nabisco employee Sydney Stern
Why Ritz	To offer Depression era shoppers a bite of the good life
Size	About 46mm across
Holes	Seven, to let steam escape in baking
Edge	Finely scalloped
Owner today	Mondel?z International

Questions people ask

Why do Ritz crackers have seven holes?

The holes let steam escape during baking, preventing air pockets and giving an even, consistent texture.

Why are they called Ritz?

A Nabisco employee, Sydney Stern, chose the name to appeal to people living through the Great Depression, offering them a bite of the good life.

Are Ritz crackers biscuits?

They are crackers, savoury biscuits with a light, buttery taste, and in Britain they sit happily on the cheeseboard next to water biscuits and cream crackers.

Have Ritz boxes got smaller?

Wikipedia records that in May 2024 200g boxes were replaced with 150g boxes while the price stayed the same, a case of what is often called shrinkflation.

Sources

1. Ritz Crackers, Wikipedia
2. Crackers, BAKERpedia
3. Oreo, Wikipedia

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