Marmite biscuits: love it or hate it, from Marmite and cheese oatcakes to homemade savoury biscuits

From the crackers.biz wiki

Marmite is a British savoury spread based on yeast extract, first made in 1902 in Burton upon Trent and now owned by Unilever. Wikipedia notes Marmite flavoured rice cakes, biscuits and Walkers crisps, and British Baker reported in 2019 that Thomas Fudge's made Marmite biscuits under licence. We stock Nairn's Marmite and cheese oatcakes, and Marmite biscuits are easy to bake at home with Cheddar.

Love it or hate it

Few flavours divide Britain like Marmite. Its own advertising made a virtue of it with the slogan Love it or hate it, and Wikipedia notes that the phrase Marmite effect is now used for anything that splits opinion. A Marmite biscuit is the ultimate test: people either reach for a second or push the plate away. For the lovers, a savoury Marmite biscuit or oatcake with a slice of strong Cheddar is hard to beat. Here is what Marmite is, the Marmite biscuits worth knowing, and how to bake your own.

What Marmite is

Wikipedia describes Marmite as a British savoury spread based on yeast extract, invented by the Marmite Food Company in 1902. The idea goes back to the late nineteenth century, when the German scientist Justus von Liebig discovered that brewer's yeast could be concentrated, bottled and eaten. In 1902, the Marmite Food Extract Company was formed in Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire, the brewing town, with the Bass Brewery supplying the yeast left over from brewing.

Marmite has changed hands several times. It became part of Bovril, and Wikipedia says it was bought by CPC International in 1990; CPC changed its name to Best Foods in 1998 and merged with Unilever in 2000, and Unilever owns Marmite today.

Marmite on the biscuit aisle

Marmite's rich, salty, savoury flavour has found its way into all kinds of snacks. Wikipedia mentions Marmite flavoured varieties of Walkers crisps and of some brands of rice cakes and biscuits. When Burton's Biscuit Company bought the Dorset baker Thomas Fudge's in 2019, British Baker reported that Fudge's had made Marmite biscuits under licence from Unilever, alongside sweet biscuits such as Florentines and savoury lines such as flatbreads; see Thomas Fudge's. Licensed flavours come and go, so the Marmite biscuits on sale

change from year to year.

Nairn's Marmite and cheese oatcakes

One Marmite biscuit on our shelves is Nairn's Marmite and cheese oatcakes, from the oatcake maker that began in Strathaven in 1896 and now bakes in Edinburgh. Open Food Facts lists the ingredients as 75% wholegrain oats, with palm fruit oil, 9% Marmite, 6% cheese, dietary fibre, sea salt and a raising agent. Oatcakes suit Marmite well: their nutty oat flavour stands up to the strong yeast extract, and the cheese rounds it off. For the Nairn's story, see Nairn's oatcakes, and for oatcakes in general, oatcakes. Nairn's also makes plain cheese oatcakes for anyone on the hate it side of the family.

Allergy advice

Marmite oatcakes are not gluten free, even though they are made mostly from oats. Open Food Facts lists the yeast extract in the Marmite as containing barley, wheat, oats and rye, and the Marmite's natural flavouring as containing celery, and the oatcakes also contain cheese, which is milk. The Marmite in the recipe also lists added vitamins: thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B12 and folic acid. Recipes change, so always check the pack.

Twiglets, the other yeast extract snack

Britain's other famous yeast extract snack is not a Marmite product at all. Wikipedia says Twiglets are a wheat based snack with a knobbly shape like twigs, invented in 1929 by the French biscuit maker J. Rondalin, who added brewer's yeast to a leftover batch of Vitawheat dough, and launched by Peek Freans in 1932. Their taste, which has been compared to Marmite, comes mainly from the yeast extract in the coating, and Jacob's makes them today in Aintree. For the full story, see Twiglets.

Marmite and cheese

Marmite and cheese are one of Britain's great savoury partnerships, from Marmite and cheese sandwiches to cheese straws brushed with Marmite. The salty depth of yeast extract brings out the flavour of a strong Cheddar. If you do not have a Marmite biscuit to hand, spread a very thin layer of Marmite on a plain cracker such as Carr's table water crackers, top it with sliced Cheddar and you have much the same effect. For more, see cheese biscuits and the best crackers for cheese.

Baking Marmite biscuits at home

Marmite biscuits are easy to make. Beat a generous teaspoon of Marmite into 100g of softened butter until smooth, then rub the butter into 150g of plain flour with 75g of finely grated mature Cheddar and a pinch of cayenne or mustard powder. Bind the dough with a spoonful or two of milk, roll it out thinly, cut it into rounds or fingers, and bake at about 180°C, or 160°C in a fan oven, for 12 to 15 minutes until golden.

For Marmite oat biscuits, replace a third of the flour with porridge oats blitzed fine in a food processor, which gives a texture closer to an oatcake. For cheese straws, cut the rolled dough into strips, twist them and bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Marmite is salty, so there is no need to add salt, and a little goes a long way: start with a teaspoon, and add more next time if you are a lover.

Marmite across the world

Yeast extract spreads are loved beyond Britain. Wikipedia says Australia's Vegemite was developed in the early 1920s, after supplies of Marmite ran short, and that New Zealand makes its own Marmite to a different recipe. Searches for biscuits with Vegemite and Marmite oat biscuits show how well the flavour travels; for Australia's biscuit favourites, see Australian biscuits.

Crackers to pair with Marmite

For a Marmite cheese board, try Jacob's Baked Cheddars, Ritz cheese crackers and plain water biscuits, with a pot of Marmite on the side for the brave; see crackers.

Quick facts

Marmite	Yeast extract spread, first made in 1902
Company formed	Burton upon Trent, 1902
Owner	Unilever, since 2000
Slogan	Love it or hate it
Nairn's oatcakes	9% Marmite and 6% cheese
Twiglets	Yeast extract coating, launched 1932

Questions people ask

What are Marmite biscuits?

Savoury biscuits or crackers flavoured with Marmite, the yeast extract spread, often with cheese. Thomas Fudge's of Dorset has made Marmite biscuits under licence, and Nairn's makes Marmite and cheese oatcakes.

What is Marmite?

Wikipedia describes Marmite as a British savoury spread based on yeast extract, invented by the Marmite Food Company in 1902. The Marmite Food Extract Company was formed that year in Burton upon Trent, with the Bass Brewery supplying the yeast.

Are Marmite biscuits discontinued?

Licensed Marmite flavours come and go. British Baker reported in 2019 that Thomas Fudge's made Marmite biscuits under licence from Unilever; check the shelves for the current range. We stock Nairn's Marmite and cheese oatcakes.

Do Marmite biscuits go with cheese?

Very well. Marmite and cheese are a classic British pairing, which is why Nairn's Marmite oatcakes are made with cheese too.

Are Marmite oatcakes gluten free?

No. Open Food Facts lists the yeast extract in the Marmite in Nairn's Marmite and cheese oatcakes as containing barley, wheat, oats and rye, and the oatcakes also contain milk and celery. Always check the pack.

How do you make Marmite biscuits?

Beat a teaspoon of Marmite into softened butter, rub it into flour with grated mature Cheddar, bind with a little milk, roll, cut and bake until golden.

Why do Twiglets taste like Marmite?

Wikipedia says the taste of Twiglets, which has been compared to Marmite, comes mainly from the yeast extract in their coating.

Sources

1. Marmite, Wikipedia
2. Burton's acquires premium supplier Thomas Fudge's, British Baker, Vince Bamford, 7 February 2019
3. Nairn's Marmite and Cheese Oatcakes (612322001698), Open Food Facts
4. Twiglets, Wikipedia
5. About us, Nairn's

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