

Short and sweet

It's not just Mama's little baby who loves short'nin' bread!



There's something special about a good shortbread. Perhaps it's the way it can crumble and melt in your mouth, or the guilty pleasure you get from indulging in such a rich treat. Or maybe it's just its simple, buttery flavour. Whatever the case, it's a perfect accompaniment to a cuppa, so being keen advocates of morning and afternoon tea here at CHOICE, we went in search of the best shortbreads to honour these occasions.

BUTTER UP

Of the 19 shortbreads rated by our Home Testers, the four pictured on the right were the favourites, described variously as tasting sweet, buttery and/or rich and with a texture that was crumbly, crunchy, dense, soft and/or light.

Compared to these top shortbreads, the lower scorers didn't meet our Home Testers' expectations of a 'real' shortbread in taste, texture or appearance. So what was

1 Brand / product (in rank order)	2 Overall rating (%)	Butter content (%)	Ingredients	3 Price per 100 g (\$)
COLES Shortbread Rounds	72	32	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, salt	1.50
CRIPPS Premium Tasmanian Shortbread (A)	70	33	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	3.25
ARNOTT'S Glengarry Original Butter Shortbread	69	32	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	1.33
COLES Shortbread Fingers	69	32	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, salt	1.23
UNIBIC Viennese Crescent	65	28	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, almond meal, egg, raising agents, flavour	1.90
WALKERS Pure Butter Shortbread	65	31	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, salt	1.37
AUSTRALIA'S CHOICE Shortbread (KMart)	64	33 (B)	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	1.00
BUTTERFINGERS Pure Butter Shortbread	64	30	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	1.37
BYRON BAY COOKIE COMPANY Shortbread Traditional	64	40 (B)	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, wheaten cornflour, rice flour	6.33
FARMLAND Butter Shortbread Biscuits	63	27	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	1.20
WALKERS Pure Butter Shortbread Rounds	63	32	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, salt	1.98
PARKWOOD Butter Shortbread (Aldi)	62	30	Wheat flour, butter, sugar	1.00
ARNOTT'S Arno Shortbread	58	14 (B)	Wheat flour, sugar, butter, vegetable oil, egg, salt, condensed milk, milk solids, raising agent, flavouring, emulsifier	0.96
UNIBIC Parisienne Butter Shortbread	53	27	Wheat flour, sugar, butter, egg	1.71
PARADISE Rich Shortbread Traditional	51	4	Wheat flour, sugar, vegetable fats or oils, margarine, butter, sweetened condensed milk, egg, milk powder, salt, raising agents, flavour	0.49
ARNOTT'S Farmbake Cookies Butter Shortbread	50	18	Wheat flour, butter, sugar, vegetable oil, emulsifier, salt, flavouring, egg	0.71
COLES Shortbread Fingers (from instore bakery)	50	17 (B)	Wheat flour, sugar, butter, vegetable margarine, vegetable oils, water, salt, emulsifiers, flavour, antioxidant, food acids, colour, rice flour, water, flavour	0.71
FARMLAND Shortbread Cookies	48	12	Wheat flour, sugar, butter, margarine, whole egg, milk solids, salt, raising agents, flavour	0.40
BI-LO Shortbread Cookies	47	12	Wheat flour, sugar, butter, margarine, whole egg, milk solids, salt, raising agents, flavour	0.40

the main difference between the ones people liked and the ones they didn't? It's simple really: the ingredients.

First, the top-rating products all contain more than 30% butter, with the proportion of butter in the less popular biscuits dwindling to as low as 4%.

Second, the more popular products all have fewer ingredients, closer to a traditional shortbread recipe (see *A short history*, right, for more). The lowest-rating brands mostly had longer ingredient lists that included non-traditional ingredients like vegetable oil, emulsifiers, egg and flavour.

Obviously something to bear in mind when you're next out buying shortbread!

SCOT-FREE?

Tartan on a box of shortbread may suggest it's Scottish in origin, but don't assume that's the case — three of the five tartan-wrapped shortbreads in our trial are in fact Australian-made.

(A) Previously Mrs McNally's; only the brand name and packaging have changed.

(B) This information isn't stated on the packaging, but was given to us by the manufacturer.

1 Brand/product

We bought all the products labelled 'shortbread' that we could find in supermarkets, grocers and department store food halls. We couldn't test them all, so we picked products that at least contain the traditional shortbread ingredients flour, butter and sugar. Flavoured varieties (as denoted by the product name — for example, butterscotch, macadamia or choc chip shortbread) were excluded, as were ones that are only sold around Christmas. The ingredients and butter content given are those listed on the product packaging, unless stated otherwise.

2 Overall rating

This is based on the tasters' overall impression of the shortbread. They were also asked to rate the shortbreads specifically for taste, texture and appearance, and these ratings tended to follow the same pattern as the overall scores.

3 Price per 100 g

As the packet sizes vary, we calculated the price per 100 g for ease of comparison (based on what we paid in February 2005).

CHOICE HOME TESTER

THE TASTE TEST

Thank you to the 220 Home Testers who took part in this trial, throwing caution to the wind by indulging in these buttery treats.

We sent each of them five brands of shortbread; each brand was tasted by about 50 people. Samples were sent wrapped in plastic and identified only by a code number so that the trialists couldn't recognise the brands.

A SHORT HISTORY

The origin of shortbread dates back to Scotland in medieval times.

Traditionally, shortbread was baked in a large round and served cut from the centre into triangles (and you can still find it made like this today). It's thought to be a relic of the ancient New Year sun cakes (a legacy of Scotland's close association with Scandinavia) that were baked with a hole in the centre and symmetrical lines around it representing the rays of the sun.

The traditional recipe is one part sugar, two parts shortening (butter) and three parts flour (originally fine oatmeal — a

staple Scottish ingredient — but now wheat flour). Other ingredients are sometimes added for taste or, like cornflour or rice flour, to lighten the texture.

Get shorty

The word 'shortening' has been used since the early 19th century to describe fats (such as butter) or oils that 'shorten' a dough, making the final product more crumbly or friable. This role is most evident in shortcrust pastry (used to make pies), but is also the reason why buttery, crumbly shortbread got its name.



THE BEST BIKKIES

COLES SHORTBREAD ROUNDS

"A very pleasant-tasting and textured shortbread — traditional."
"Tastes like shortbread should taste."

CRIPPS PREMIUM TASMANIAN SHORTBREAD

(Formerly MRS McNALLY'S, but the same recipe.)
"This had the butteriest taste so scored the highest for that reason."
"Yummy! Looks home-made."

ARNOTT'S GLENGARRY ORIGINAL BUTTER SHORTBREAD

"I liked this one a lot — the texture was between hard and crunchy."
"More golden/well done appearance. Liked the sugar sprinkles."

COLES SHORTBREAD FINGERS

"Traditional thick buttery shortbread."
"I really liked it 'cos it wasn't too sweet and not really crumbly like some shortbreads."