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How to Bread Anything (Including Crispy Parmesan Pork Chops)

The key to perfectly crunchy pork chops, chicken cutlets, fish fillets, tofu (and more!) is simpler than you think



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Crispy Parmesan Breaded Pork Chops. Photographs by Olga Ivanova

When I was growing up, that famous-name coating mix from a box was my mom's go-to for crunchy chicken cutlets. Obviously, I loved them — who wouldn't? But once I tasted my Italian-American husband's family recipe, I learned how much better breading could be. And the technique is *almost* as easy as that stuff you shake and bake: You just dredge the food in flour, dip it in beaten egg, and coat it in crumbs. From that base, of course, you can add all kinds of flavoring twists, but the technique remains the same.

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Ingredients for breading

No matter what you're coating — pork, chicken, shrimp, fish fillets, tofu, eggplant, or anything else you'd like to crunch on — these three things are crucial:

1. Flour. A thin, smooth coating of flour helps to seal in juices — and it gives the egg something to grab onto (the crumbs won't stick without the egg). Almost any kind of flour will do, except self-rising flour, since that has baking powder added to it.

2. Eggs. Well-beaten eggs adhere to the flour and make a nice, gluey consistency. While normally "gluey" isn't a word you want to see in a recipe, here it just means the breadcrumb mixture will cling in an even layer.

- Out of eggs? Stir 1 tablespoon of ground flaxseed into 3 tablespoons of water for each egg. Let the mixture sit for a few minutes, and the texture will be remarkably similar. Or smear a thin coating of mayo onto the floured food instead.

- Add a heaping teaspoon of Dijon mustard for each egg (or equivalent) if you'd like to add another flavor source.

3. Breadcrumbs (and optional seasoning). The most basic coating calls for nothing but dried breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper.

- But you can swap in all kinds of dry crumbs — there's panko, of course, which has larger, fluffier pieces for extra crunch, or you can make your own crumbs from things like crackers, cereal, chips, or pretzels. Crush them to be no bigger than panko crumbs, because larger pieces tend to fall off in the pan.

- Once you've chosen your crumb, you can keep it simple with nothing but salt and pepper — or you can layer in all kinds of flavors. My favorite is freshly grated Parmesan cheese, which gives it a salty, umami punch. Dried herbs and spices like oregano,

parsley, garlic powder, and paprika are also great, as are spice blends like Italian seasoning and herbes de Provence. And if you want a brighter flavor, stir in some fresh lemon zest.

How to bread anything



Once you understand the basic technique, you'll want to try it on everything (except cake, I suppose). To avoid accidentally breading your fingertips, use one hand for the steps with dry ingredients and the other hand for the egg dunk.

1. Prep your protein or veggie

Boneless, skinless pork chops or chicken breasts need to be sliced about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick or pounded to this thickness (many markets sell them already prepped). If you're breading tofu, you'll want to slice it into planks and press out as much liquid as possible before starting, then add your favorite flavoring to the tofu itself (I like a little soy sauce). For **fish sticks**, cut 1-inch-thick fillets into 1-inch wide strips. Shrimp are good to go as they are — assuming they're shelled and deveined, of course. If you're breading eggplant, aim for $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch slices.

2. Set up your breading station

Put the seasoned flour, beaten egg, and seasoned crumbs into three separate, shallow

containers, in that order. Have a platter at the end of the row for your breaded items.



3. Start breading

Pat the protein or veggie ingredient dry, then use your left hand to dredge it in the flour. Shake gently to remove any excess — you want a very thin layer. Transfer your floured food to the egg bowl. Use your right hand to flip it over and make sure it's completely coated in liquid, then allow any extra to drip off. With your right hand, move the food to the bowl of crumbs, and use your left hand to scoop crumbs over the top. Gently press the crumbs into the egg to help them adhere, then flip and do the same on the other side. Transfer the breaded food to your nearby platter. Repeat with the remaining food, until each item is coated.



4. Pan-fry or bake

Fry the food in shallow oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Or give it a light coating of cooking oil spray and bake at 400°F, turning once, until golden brown on both sides — the timing will depend on what you've breaded.

Crispy Parmesan Breaded Pork Chops recipe

Let's take your new breading skills for a spin with this simple recipe for pork chops that come out moist on the inside and beautifully browned and crispy on the outside.

Remember, you can use this same technique to bread virtually anything (except, again, cake).

Crispy Parmesan Breaded Pork Chops



Crispy Parmesan Breaded Pork Chops by Yummly



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