



# Open Benne!

By Joquita Burka

It's an African word that means "sesame." And its history in South Carolina dates back to the 17th-century when slaves first arrived with the little seeds that they called "benne" and thought brought them good luck.

Today, sesame seeds are considered a healthy food—a source of several nutrients. They form the main ingredient in the popular tahini and spice up many Southeast Asian foods, even gracing the outside of sushi rolls.

However, around the South Carolina Lowcountry, the favorite use for sesame seeds is in the crisp, delicious benne seed cookie (or wafer). A little buttery, a little sweet, a little crunchy, benne seed cookies are, many think, the perfect cookies.

You can find benne seed cookies in most of the markets in Charleston. I'd recommend purchasing a bag and munching your way along the narrow cobblestone streets, past 300-year-old homes, along the breathtaking Battery and White Point Gardens. It is by far the best way to enjoy them. However, if you can't get here right now, whip up a batch yourself with this almost 60-year-old recipe from the famous *Charleston Receipts*.<sup>†</sup>

The Charleston Junior League cookbook, *Charleston Receipts*, has been Charleston's "Bible of the Kitchen" since 1950. The recipes are part history, part tradition and completely delicious. Best of all, proceeds go to non-profit organizations in the Charleston area.

Available at Charleston-area shops or at [jlcharleston.org](http://jlcharleston.org).

## Benne Seed Cookies

- ¾ c. butter
- 1½ c. brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- ¼ t. baking powder
- 1¼ c. flour
- ½ c. roasted benne\*
- 1 t. vanilla



Cream butter and sugar together and mix with other ingredients in the order given. Drop with a teaspoon on waxed paper in pan far enough apart to allow spreading. Bake in moderate oven (325°) for 30 minutes. Yield: 7 dozen.

\*To roast or parch benne seeds, put in heavy pan on top of stove or in oven until dark brown.

From *Charleston Receipts*, The Junior League of Charleston, Inc.