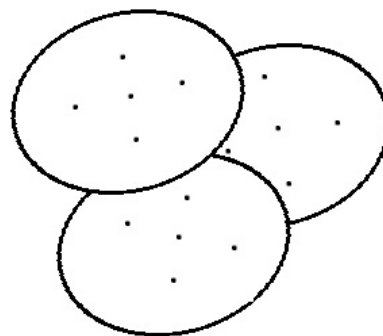


'Hardtack'

Up through at least the late 1800s 'hardtack,' or 'hardtack biscuits,' (and in some circles it is also known as 'cram'), was a common food both on ocean voyages, and on the trail. It was used because it is nutritious, easy to make, and if kept dry, it will keep almost indefinitely. There are many different recipes for hardtack, but, in it's simplest form, all you need is flour and water.

- About 2 cups / 500 ml Whole Wheat Flour (it's really not necessary to measure the amount)
- About ¼ to ½ teaspoon / ½ ml Salt (the salt can even be omitted if necessary)
- Enough Water to make a stiff dough

Preheat the oven to about 375 degrees F. Mix the flour and salt in a mixing bowl, and add enough water to make a stiff dough. Spread some flour on a flat surface, and knead the dough a little, until it is smooth and not 'sticky.' (If the dough is 'sticky' sprinkle a little more flour on it.) After kneading, roll out the dough to about 2 mm thick. Then, with a biscuit cutter, or just use a clean empty tin can, or the top of a glass, cut discs out of the dough that are about 5 to 7 cm diameter. Place these discs on a cookie sheet, and bake them until they are golden brown —about 20 minutes. Remove them from the oven, and if possible, place them on a rack to cool. If you are wanting to preserve them for future use, as soon as they have cooled put them in a sealed container as they will re-absorb moisture from the air. They keep best when they are kept 'bone dry.' I have some hardtack that I've kept for several years, and they were still good.



Feel free to experiment with this basic recipe. Just about any flour or meal can be used or mixed in. The best batch we've ever made was when we added some sunflower seed meal we happened to have once! Honey, molasses, or brown sugar can be added to sweeten them. Oil can also be added, which will make them softer and more 'chewable.' But keep in mind that any oil, or oily meal will eventually go rancid and decrease the 'shelf life.' For this reason some people use white flour, because without the wheat germ it will keep longer. But we prefer the healthy texture and taste of the whole grain flour, and it still keeps many years. Using equal parts of whole wheat flour, corn meal, and oatmeal works well. The 'biscuits' can be cut into squares or rectangles if you choose. 'Dimples' can also be poked into them with a toothpick or a fork to keep them from puffing up while baking. Some people also make them up to 1 cm thick, then soak them in a hot drink or soup before eating them. But we have found this doesn't do much to soften them, and is one reason to make them on the 'thin side.' As the name implies, hardtack is quite hard. So don't just bite down on one! Break them in pieces, and chew them with your molars.

Hardtack is an excellent 'emergency food.' As long as it is kept dry it won't spoil. It doesn't crush easily in your pack. And, because of it's hardness it isn't something you should just want to pick up and snack on. So, in theory it should still be there for an 'emergency.' However, probably due to its wholesome goodness, we have found that we frequently end up eating it anyway! So, back to the kitchen, to make another batch of hardtack!