

# Fire Pit Baking Class

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**Caveat:** *This class is mainly a practical guide to fire pit baking; it is as period as possible, but not 100% period.*

Baking does not require an oven; just a way of concentrating heat around the item to be baked. There are many methods of accomplishing this goal, starting with the most primitive; the clam bake or luau, in which a fire is built in a deep pit lined with stones, the coals are scraped away when the stones are hot, the food and insulation material (seaweed, straw) are added, and covered with soil or sand until “done”. Due to the work involved, especially the digging (the pit should be at least 5 feet deep), this method is only practical for special occasions or one-time events. You also need to have a really good idea of where the bedrock or the water table starts in your digging area!

You can also go fairly “high tech”, with manufactures items ranging from the Coleman stove top oven to various solar-powered reflector ovens (NOTORIOUSLY unreliable and overpriced) available from your local “mountaineering supply” outlet, Eddie Bauer, or similar expensive merchandisers.

There are also homemade reflector ovens of the type some of us made in Girl or Boy Scouts. Usually these consisted of a cardboard box lined with aluminum foil with the open side pointed towards your fire and a rack propped halfway up inside them. This certainly CAN work (I’ve used them many times), but they are rather flimsy, require much food rotation and have a nasty tendency to catch on fire. The advantage is the cheapness and complete lack of maintenance. The only way to regulate heat is to move them closer or further from your fire. Do so CAREFULLY, as they want to collapse, spill, or disintegrate whenever possible. DO NOT use waxed or plastic coated boxes such as the ones that produce come in. While sturdy, they will melt or burn, causing sickening (and possibly toxic) fumes.

My preferred method (you just KNEW I was going to get here at some point!) is the Dutch oven. The Dutch oven (or kettle oven) is a reliable device that produces even heat when used properly. It is quite period, and reasonably easy to obtain (through outfitters for black-powder, buck skimmers, voyageurs, and similar “later- period” recreationists, and also through mail order from cast iron manufacturers).<sup>1</sup> They are not cheap, however, ranging in price from \$60 - \$150. The good news is that, with proper care, you will hand them on to your grandchildren, AND, because other people handed on theirs, they are often available at garage sales and flea markets. Beware of any that have been turned into planters, as they may have rusted through, and no one will know where the lid is, and DO NOT purchase Dutch ovens that have been painted... they are not safe!

## Tips for your Dutch oven:

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<sup>1</sup> Lodge Cast Iron  
Lodge Manufacturing Company  
P.O. Box 380  
240 East 5th Street  
South Pittsburg, TN 37380  
phone 423-837-7181

<http://www.lodgemfg.com/>

<http://www.grayandholt.com/newlodge.htm/> (not the official Lodge site, but still a good source)

1. ONLY get cast iron. There are many pan manufacturers who call a large aluminum stockpot with plastic handles (!) a “Dutch oven”. It is not!
2. DO NOT purchase one with a glass lid. That is a baked bean pot, not a Dutch oven.
3. DO NOT buy a Dutch oven without feet; the heat cannot circulate properly with such a device.
4. Do season it properly. Most manufacturers of cast iron products will include directions on how to do this. If you can’t find them, ask me. Or you can check out this page on the Web. <[www.grayandholt.com/tips.htm](http://www.grayandholt.com/tips.htm)>
5. DO NOT purchase one without a lid. What’s the point? And no, you will NEVER find a lid that fits properly after the fact.
6. Make sure your lid is close fitting and, if you can, get the type that is flat with a lip or flange so that you can put coals on the top.

### **Be certain to obtain these essential tools:**

1. A hook, or a poker with a bent end, or other device, for lifting and moving your Dutch oven. Remember, it is VERY heavy!
2. HEAVY DUTY gloves or mitts, at a minimum welders gloves. Regular oven mitts (even the kind with a silvery “reflecting” surface) aren’t enough.
3. A small shovel with a long handle for moving coals. Your mom’s fireplace shovel that she never uses should work.
4. A small metal rack or trivet that fits the bottom inside your Dutch oven.
5. Cooling rack(s). Where will you put that hot bread?
6. Metal oven thermometer.

When using a Dutch oven, be sure your fire is scraped to the side, the pot placed on the flat spot, and the coals replaced evenly (but not too closely or thickly) around it. Put your oven thermometer inside the oven and place the lid on it. Give it 15 minutes, remove the lid and read the temp. If its 10-20 degrees cooler than you want, it’s perfect, as the additional coals you will lay on the lid will raise the temp. If it’s too hot, scrape some coals away and leave the lid off the Dutch oven until it reaches the right temp.

Place your pan CAREFULLY inside, replace the lid, put some coals on top, and WAIT. At about 2/3’s through your cooking time scrape off the lid coals and lift it completely away. check for “doneness” and proceed as before. Add more coals around and on the top if it seems slow.

Rather than go into proper methods of fire building here, I will assume that you know you need to use hard woods only, no conifer woods, and you should never use chemicals on your fire.

Let me repeat that:

**NEVER USE @\*!%!!?\* CHEMICALS ON YOUR FIRE!!!!!!**

No gas; nothing! Never put garbage in it either! Few items are as “organic” as their appearance would lead one to believe.

Cook fires, especially those for baking, need to consist of a good bed of glowing coals with little or no open flames. A good bonfire is a poor cook-fire and vice-versa. Any idiot can build a bonfire; it takes a special type of idiot to build a cook-fire. Almost the only way of learning how to do this is through observation. Make a date to observe a good cook fire builder soon, if unsure.

You can also “bake” on top of your (properly- built!) cook-fire, on a griddle, making (English) muffins, crumpets, griddle scones, flat bread or biscuits. If you have a fire, some flour, fat and

leavening, you need never be without bread, and if you add sugar (and hopefully some fruit and / or spices) you have deserts or sweet rolls. Baking on a griddle requires no lid, but you can get a quicker result *with* one (and more even browning).

You can also SORT OF bake in the top of a double broiler, or you can steam sponge cakes and Boston brown bread in covered bowls or pans inside a large pot with a couple inches of boiling water in the bottom.

There are almost infinite possibilities for baking in or on your fire-pit. At the 23 Pennsics I've attended, I've baked everything from a cheese soufflé (to win a \$20 bet..... I won!) to a last minute 3 layer birthday cake complete with frosting and decorations (Ziplock bags can substitute for pastry bags in a pinch!). But you needn't be elaborate; a simple bread or pie is terrifically satisfying (and impresses the living "what not" out of your fellow campers!), and some homemade rolls or crumpets are much nicer than anything you can buy at the store- and much cheaper.

Yes, baking takes time, but so does trekking to you car and driving into town for bread, or slogging up to the camp store to see if they still have any of the kind you want.

## **Good Baking and Good Eating!**

# Recipes

## Griddle Breads

### English Muffins

- *Note: You can use rings (egg or muffin) for these if you absolutely need a uniform size, but it's not necessary*

1 cup warm water (@ 110 degrees F)

½ c. warm milk (or altogether 1 ½ c. warm water with 2 T powdered milk)

2 tsp. sugar

1 tsp. salt

1 pkg. (or 2 ¼ tsp.) dried yeast dissolved in 2 T warm water for 10 minutes.

Mix all ingredients together, then add 2 c flour ( *all purpose or bread*). Beat well. Put a cloth over the bowl and allow it to rise until it collapses back on itself. Then gradually work in: 2 c flour (*yes 2 more*).

Roll dough out about ¾ inch thick, cut into 3-4 inch rounds, cover and allow to rise until doubled.

Bake on preheated, greased griddle, turning once, until golden brown.

### Crumpets

Make the same as the English Muffins, but do use the rings when baking.

Follow previous recipe, but use 2 ¾ milk, not ½, (*3 ¾ cups of liquid all together*).

Make sure your rings are buttered, fill ½ full (*batter only needs one rise, but treat gently so you don't knock it down*), and bake on bottom till golden brown.

Turn over just long enough to set the tops and remove to cooling rack.

- Apprentice question: “Say Manthra how come my English muffins don't have that gritty stuff on the outside like the store bought kind?”
- Answer: “Because that's corn meal, and we are not using it.”

### Griddle Scones

2 c flour (*regular*)

1 pinch salt

3 tsp. baking powder

2 T butter or margarine

2 T sugar

1 egg beaten with enough milk to make 2/3 cup

Mix flour, baking powder and salt; rub in butter. Mix in sugar. Mix to a soft dough (BRIEFLY!) with egg/ milk mixture. Knead 1 min, divide in 3, roll out each piece to ¼ inch thickness, cut into 4 pie wedges. Bake on a moderate griddle for 3 min. each side. Makes 12 scones.

# Bread Recipes

## Egg Bread

from La Varenne (1651) "*Le Patissier Francois*"

1 c butter (*do not substitute*) cut up

1  $\frac{3}{4}$  c milk

2 tsp. salt

2 pkgs. (4  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp.) dried yeast

approx. 6 c flour (*bread flour preferred*)

2 eggs beaten

1 egg, beaten with  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt (*for glaze*)

Optional: powdered sugar, rosewater (*to finish*)

Heat butter with milk till melted; cool until just warm (*105-115 degrees*). Sprinkle yeast over it and leave until dissolved. Sift flour and salt, make a well in the center and add eggs and yeast mixture. Stir with your hand, gradually drawing in the flour until dough is soft but not sticky, adding more flour if necessary. Flour work surface and knead dough until smooth and elastic (*5 - 10 mins*). Put ball of dough on floured surface and sprinkle top with flour. Cover with damp cloth and let rise until surface cracks. Knock dough down, shape into round loaf and put on buttered baking pan (*flat*). Cover again and leave to rise till doubled in bulk. Slash top with sharp knife, glaze with egg and salt mixture and bake at 400 degrees F for 30 mins. Move oven away from heat (*or at home, turn oven down*) to 350 degrees F and bake for 45 mins more.

Cool on rack. If you want, while the bread is hot, sprinkle top with sugar and spoon 1 tsp. of rosewater over it.

## White Bread (*this recipe works really well as a base for cinnamon rolls*)

6 c (*approx.*) bread flour

1-2 tsp. salt

2 T butter or margarine

1 pkg. (2 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp.) dried yeast

$\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. sugar

2 c. warm water (*105-115 degrees F*)

Mix flour and salt and rub in fat. Sprinkle yeast on  $\frac{1}{4}$  c of the water and sugar. Let proof 5 mins, then add with the rest of the water to flour mixture. Mix well, then knead 10 mins, put in greased bowl, cover and let rise until doubled.

Knock down dough, shape into 2 loaves and let rise covered until double in size.

Bake at 450 degrees F until brown, approx. 30 mins.

### **Honey Whole Wheat Bread**

3 ½ -4 c bread flour  
2 ½ c wheat flour  
1 T salt  
2 pkgs. (4 ½ tsp.) dry yeast  
1 c milk  
1 c water  
1 c honey  
1 egg  
3 T butter or shortening

Combine together 2 c bread flour, 1 c whole-wheat flour, yeast and salt. In a saucepan heat milk, water, honey and butter to 120-130 degrees F. Add to dry ingredients. Add egg. Beat for 3 mins hard. Gradually stir in rest of whole-wheat flour and enough bread flour to make a firm dough. Knead 10 mins. Put in greased bowl, turn to grease top, cover and let rise until double in size. Punch down, shape into 2 loaves, put in/ on greased pans, cover and let rise until doubled. Bake at 375 degrees F for 35-40 mins. Remove from pans and cool.

### **Herb Batter Bread**

3 ¼ cups all-purpose flour or bread flour  
2 pkgs. dry yeast (or 4 ½ tsp.)  
2 T granulated sugar  
1 T dried minced onion  
2 tsp. dill seed or weed  
1 tsp. salt  
8 oz plain yogurt  
½ c water  
1 egg  
2 T butter or shortening

In a large bowl combine all dry ingredients, except 2 c of the flour, and mix well. In a small saucepan heat yogurt, water and butter until it's 120-130 degrees F. Butter does not need to melt. Add to dry mixture. Add egg. Mix until well moistened, then beat hard for 3 mins until well blended. Add enough of remaining flour to get a stiff batter. Place into greased 1 ½ - 2 qt casserole or deep pan or heat proof bowl. Cover and let rise until doubled, approx. 1 hour. Bake at 375 degrees for 35-40 minutes until golden brown. Remove from pan to rack. Serve warm or cold. Makes 1 loaf.

### **Brick Alley Bread** *(this bread is best served warm from the oven with butter and honey)*

2 c whole wheat or rye flour  
½ tsp. salt  
1 tsp. baking soda (yes this is an OOP ingredient, but the bread is too good to leave out)  
1 egg well beaten  
1 c buttermilk  
2 T honey

Mix dry ingredients together. Mix wet ingredients together. Combine the two mixtures. DO NOT OVER MIX! Shape dough into a small flat round loaf on a greased or floured baking sheet (or *cake pan*) and cut 2 parallel slashes in the top about ½ inch deep. Bake at 375 degrees F for 25-30 mins.

# Fire Pit Baking Class

*with Mistress Aramanthra the Viscious*

**For those attending this class, please be aware of certain items that you will need.**

1. Please dress with flames and flour in mind. Wear an apron and garb that you don't mind getting messy since you will be kneading bread. We will be working around fire so wear sturdy enclosed shoes or boots and garb that doesn't have trailing things. We don't want you to go up like a torch.
1. Each participant must bring a piece of firewood no smaller than the diameter of their calf and approx. as long (no less than 2 feet).
2. Each person must bring a potholder or oven mitt. Two would be best.
3. Please bring a writing utensil to take notes with.
4. Please bring a bag or cloth to take some fresh baked goodies back to your camps in.
5. Please bring \$1.00 to cover the cost of the handout and the ingredients that will be used during the class.

***\*Note: In case of inclimate weather the class will be rescheduled.***