

Civil War Hardtack

Have you ever taken a bag of snacks with you on a road trip? If you lived in the 19th century, you might have taken hardtack instead. Hardtack was a kind of cracker that sailors, Civil War soldiers, and the pioneers carried with them so they would have something to eat if they found themselves in a place where food wasn't available. The high salt content in the dough acted as a preservative, giving it the ability to stay good for long periods of time. It's said that a well-made batch of hardtack could stay edible for a few years!



What You Need:

- 2 c. whole wheat flour
- ½ to 1 c. water
- 6 pinches of salt
- 1 tbsp. vegetable shortening or oil
- Rolling pin
- Cookie sheet

What You Do:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
2. Have your child mix the flour and salt in a bowl with her hands or a large wooden spoon.
3. Help her slowly add water to the flour and salt, using just enough so that the dough will form – it doesn't have to be the full cup. Make sure the dough won't stick to her hands or utensils. It should be dry to the touch, but still squishy.
4. Have her roll out the dough, shaping it into a large rectangle that's about ½ in. thick.
5. Cut the dough into equal-sized squares. Try making them small enough to throw in your pocket or pack before you trek across the battlefield.
6. Have your child carefully use a pointed implement like a kebab skewer, fondue fork or a steak knife to press 4 rows of 4 small indents across each piece, so that it looks like a saltine cracker. Be careful not to poke all the way through!
7. Have her lay out the squares on a cookie sheet and bake for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Turn each piece over and bake for another 30 minutes.
8. Turn the oven off and let the hardtack cool on a wire rack.



Despite its reputation as a tasteless, dry food, hardtack is still a pantry staple in a few countries like Japan and Canada. The most enthusiastic buyers in the United States are Civil War re-enactors, who buy it in order to better understand what life was like for the Union and Confederate troops.