

DUTCH OVEN BREAD

As with campfire cooking, it is beneficial to build a fire with an area for cooking at one end, with the other end used to generate more embers to be dragged over and used when your cooking area cools.

Breads have a tendency to burn on the bottom, but this is usually caused by putting too many coals under the oven and not enough on top. When cooking breads, rolls, and biscuits, almost all the heat should be coming from the top so place 3/4 of the coals on top of your oven.

Also try placing 4 or 5 small pebbles in the bottom of your oven, mix up your bread recipe as normal and put it in a baking tin, balance this tin on the pebbles and then cook as required. Having the tin raised on the pebbles allows air to flow under and around the bread creating a more even heat all around and minimizing the chance of burning.

This really works well, use this method to cook bread, rolls, pastry, or anything you like.

As an alternative I also like to cook my bannock in a large cast iron skillet and have included a very quick and simple recipe you may want to try.

Recipe – Bread Simple

This recipe produces a lovely small loaf with a nice dome. I cook this loaf in a Dutch oven or an improvised oven; a stainless billy can with another smaller billy inside, and a tier from a Zebra stainless tiffin food carrier or similar.

1. Measure out 1 mug of good quality, **strong bread baking flour** (350ml mug) and ½ teaspoon of **salt** and put in a mixing bowl (or something that will do the job), ideally warm the bowl first.
2. Activate the yeast, I use Allinson dried active yeast; Add 1 teaspoon of **sugar**, a pinch of **flour** and 1 teaspoon of **dried active yeast** to a ⅓ of a mug of **warm / hot water**, mix well and leave to activate – bubble and froth for a few minutes. I find the best way to judge the temperature is to carefully put a finger in the water, it should feel hot, but not so much as you need to remove your finger – please take care not to scold your finger!
3. Once the yeast is activated and frothy, add to the flour and salt, and mix well and form into a single ball of dough. You want a loose dough, not too dry but not too wet, add a little warm water or a sprinkle of flour as required. *Hold the bowl with one hand and mix with the other, that way you will have a clean hand to add more flour if a little wet or more water if to the dough is to dry.*
4. **Knead** your dough, stretching it out and getting the glutens to develop and make an elastic dough.
5. **Oil** your baking pan (the tiffin tin), I like to use a little olive oil, and put the dough in the tin. Place a few green sticks (or stones) in the bottom of the oven billy can and place the tiffin tin inside. Place the lid on and then put near the fire to warm and prove the dough. **Ideally you want it to double in size.** Depending on the weather conditions and temperature of your fire this is likely to take 20-30 minutes.
6. When the dough has proved sufficiently (half again / doubled in size), scrape back the embers of the fire and place the oven in the middle and push the embers back up against it. Baking typically takes 20-30 minutes; check after 10-15 minutes and if it looks like a loaf with a nice raised dome, replace the lid and cover with hot embers to finish baking.
7. To judge if the loaf is cooked through, use a thin pointed stick as a skewer and push it through the top of the loaf. It should go through with little resistance and come out clean. If it does, turn out the loaf and tap the bottom, it should sound hollow.
8. Once you are happy with the basic recipe, experiment with a few additions, make a cracked black pepper and cheddar cheese version (simple chop up some cheese and add plenty of black pepper). Or how about a pesto bread, just add some to the dough, or make a hedgerow version with herbs from the hedge or if still around some wild garlic. If adding dry ingredients, then you may need a little more water to keep the dough loose. If adding wet ingredients such as berries or currants, then take care to reduce the liquid added otherwise you will end up with a very wet and sticky dough – but if you do just add a little more flour.

Recipe – Bannock

As much as I love making bread, if you are pushed for time and hungry then a bannock is just the answer, it's quick and easy to make.

1. Measure out ½ mug of good quality, **strong bread baking flour** (350ml mug), ¾ teaspoon of **baking powder**, 2-3 dessert spoons of **milk powder**, 1 teaspoon of **sugar**, I like to use muscovado, a brown sugar to add flavour and if you want a more cake like bannock a dessert spoon of whole egg powder.
2. Mix all these together with sufficient **water**, warm if you like, to create a slightly sticky but firm dough.
3. Prepare a stick ready for cooking the bannock, use green wood to reduce the chances of it burning. Trim the bark back to avoid imparting any bitterness to the bread – be careful what specifies you choose, a hazel, sycamore, ash or oak stick should be fine. Use a long stick, so you don't have to be quite so close to the fire and avoid the smoke.
4. To cook the bannock, roll the dough out into a long sausage and wrap around the stick. Leave room between the twists around the stick to allow it to rise and cook. It should resemble a helter-skelter, with room for an imaginary marble to roll down! Squash down the ends onto the stick so it doesn't fall off into the fire.
5. Cook over the embers until golden brown all over. It should be firm to touch but still have some spring to it. Carefully slide off the stick and eat while warm. When you twist the cooked dough on the stick, it should come away clean rather than be doughy – if it is not bake for a little longer!
6. Alternatively, rather than use a stick, cook in a heated and oiled cast iron skillet. Press the bannock dough down into the pan so that it is thumb thick. Prop up the skillet near the embers to cook in the radiated heat, turn as and when necessary to cook evenly all over. When the first side is done, turn and repeat. Tradition has it that bannock should be broken, so please don't cut your bannock.
7. Another option is to cook directly in the fire – to do this make small, thinner patties, and place them directly on white hot ashes! It's a good idea to have made something to move and flip the patties, perhaps a long handles spatula or set of tongs. Obviously, there is far greater chance of your bread burning, but with care, you can achieve good results, though some practice is required to avoid burnt bannock!

Recipe – Flatbread

1. Unlike the leavened breads above, a flatbread as the name suggests, doesn't have any raising agent. Obviously, they need to be flat and this means thin too. So before making, it would be good to make a rolling pin or something long and round to roll out your dough.
2. The basics of a flatbread are flour, some fat, a few herbs and a little water. A half cup of **bread flour** will make 4 flatbreads, add the **herbs**, some **butter** or olive oil and a little **water** and mix into a firm dough.
3. Divide into 4 balls and roll out into thin round disks – use flour on the rolling pin and whatever you are rolling them on, a long top perhaps to avoid them sticking.
4. Cook them in a hot and well-oiled pan, flipping occasionally until done. They are best eaten while hot or warm.
5. Alternatively, if you don't have a pan for cooking, place them directly on white hot ashes to cook.