

25
*Depression Era
Recipes*



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The Great Depression, lasting for about 10 years from 1929 to 1939, was a time of extreme hardship for many people worldwide, but particularly hard hitting for Americans.

Countless Americans lost homes, jobs, and their life savings as a crushing economic tidal wave swept across the land.

As the old saying goes, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Americans were forced by circumstances to scrimp, save and be extremely resourceful in making every penny stretch as far as possible.

When it came to food, some families became homeless and had to beg for food or turn to public soup kitchens for nourishment.

Those fortunate enough to keep their homes often had to wait in long lines to obtain groceries. Hunting, fishing and foraging for wild edibles also became important ways for many families to provide food for their table.

As women were the primary family cooks during that time, they had to figure out new and creative ways to make their meager food provisions last as long as possible.

Malnourishment and gnawing hunger were a reality for too many families in America.

One-dish suppers were commonplace during the Depression, and basic staples like sugar, coffee and flour could be hard to come by.

Various types of soups—often containing an interesting mix of ingredients—were a popular Depression-era dish, and simple biscuits were a common fixture of the day.

In the midst of true suffering, there were bright spots of neighbors helping neighbors, churches and civic groups meeting needs, and even strangers showing kindness to each other.

Gathered together in this book are several recipes from the Depression Era. From soups to biscuits to simple desserts, real people used these recipes to feed their families, share with a neighbor, or maybe even help a total stranger who came begging to their door.

It has been said that those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. There are important lessons to be gained from the strength and resilience of those who went through the Depression.

May these recipes help each one of us to appreciate all we’ve been given, and to remember those who went before us.

Cereal & Bread Recipes

Cereals or grains have long been an important part of people's diet, and this was no different during the Depression. Whether wheat, corn, oats, rice or barley, grains were a main type of food for many during this era. Wheat, the "staff of life," was relatively common and formed the backbone of many meals. Since nothing was wasted, stale bread could be made into croutons, soup sticks, or toast (see French Toast recipe below).

Rolled oats or wheat

Ingredients

1 cup rolled oats or wheat
2 cups boiling water
1 tsp salt

Directions

Boil cereal for 10 minutes. If using a double boiler, cook over boiling water for another hour as longer cooking time tends to improve the flavor. Add dates, raisins or other available fruit for extra flavor and nutrition. Top with sugar, molasses, honey, or maple syrup if available for sweetness.

Cornmeal Mush

Ingredients

1 cup cornmeal
4 cups boiling water
2 ½ tsp salt

Directions

Bring water to boil, then add salt. Gradually add the cornmeal, stirring constantly. Cook for 10 minutes. If using double boiler, cook for up to 3 hours longer as longer cooking time tends to improve the flavor. Add butter or fresh cream to the cooked cornmeal if available.

Cornmeal Mush Cakes

Place leftover cornmeal mush into a dish and smooth it down. Cut cold cornmeal into slices about a half inch thick. Dip each slice into flour. Melt a half teaspoon dripping (lard) into a hot frying pan. Brown the floured slices on each side. Drain if needed and serve on a hot plate with honey, molasses or maple syrup.

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Baked Corn Cake

Ingredients

1 pint cornmeal
2 quarts boiling water
2 tsp salt
1 oz butter ($\frac{1}{4}$ a stick)

Directions

Scald cornmeal with water and add salt. Spread the scalded cornmeal on about one-fourth inch thick on a greased baking pan. Bake in hot oven until quite dry. (Many households in the 1930s still used wood or other stoves without reliable thermometers, so precise cooking temperatures were often unknown. In modern terms a "hot oven" would probably be around 400 degrees.)

Note for recipes calling for compressed yeast: One (1/4-ounce) yeast packet of dry yeast or 1 cake fresh, compressed yeast *equals* 2- 1/4 teaspoons dry yeast (active dry or instant active dry).

Wheat Bread

Ingredients

2 cups scalded milk, or boiling water
1 TB salt
1 TB sugar
1 TB butter or other fat like lard
 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz compressed yeast dissolved in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lukewarm water
6 to 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour

Directions

Place salt, sugar, and butter in large mixing bowl. Pour in the hot milk or water. When lukewarm, add dissolved yeast and 5 cups flour, mixing and stirring well with knife or spoon. Add remaining flour, mix and turn the dough out on a floured board and knead until soft and elastic. Put the dough back into the bowl, moisten, cover and let rise in a warm place until double its size. Cut down, toss on floured board, and divide into loaves. Place into greased or floured bread pans. Cover the bread and again allow it to double in bulk, then bake one hour in a hot oven. If formed into biscuits, use more heat and less time. Remove from pans and place in draft if you want a hard crust. For a soft crust, roll bread in a clean cloth. This recipe makes 2 loaves. To make 4 large loaves, use 3 pints milk or water, 3 TB each salt, sugar, fat, 5 quarts flour, and 1 oz yeast dissolved in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lukewarm watered-d

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Braided Bread

Follow directions above for Wheat Bread and take bread dough when ready to shape into loaves. Divide the dough into halves, thirds, fourths, etc., according to the number of strands desired for each loaf. Knead slightly and roll the strands evenly, prick with a fork, then twist into a braid. Place each braided loaf into a floured pan to rise until very light. Brush top of bread with yolk of well-beaten egg to which a TB of cold water has been added. Sprinkle with poppy seeds if available. Bake in hot oven for 45 to 60 minutes. Cool in a draft to form a hard crust.

Rolls

Follow directions above for Wheat Bread. When ready to shape into loaves, make a long, even roll. Cut into small even pieces and shape with thumb and fingers into round balls. Set close together in a shallow pan, let rise until double the bulk, and bake in a hot oven for 10 to 20 minutes. For crusty rolls, set dough far apart in a shallow pan, bake thoroughly, and cool in a draft.

Rye Bread

Rye bread is made the same way as wheat bread, using rye flour in place of wheat flour. If desired, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the quantity of wheat flour may be mixed with the rye. Caraway seeds sprinkled in the dough add a tasty flavor. Bake longer than wheat bread. Oven must be hot, and the crust should be hard. Brush loaves with water to make them shine.

Currant Bread

Ingredients

2 pints flour
3 tsp baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
2 cups milk
1 cup currants
1 egg
1 TB sugar

Mix dry ingredients. Wash and dry currants and dredge with flour. Add egg to milk and combine the mixtures. Bake in a deep pain in a hot oven for 30 minutes.

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Bread Sticks

Ingredients

1 cup scalded milk
½ cup butter
1 ½ TB sugar
1 yeast cake
1 egg white
3 ¾ cups flour
½ tsp salt

Directions

Add butter, sugar, and salt to milk. When lukewarm, add yeast, well-beaten egg white, and flour. Knead, let rise, roll, and shape into the size of a pencil. Place dough in floured pan, far apart, and brush tops with beaten yolk of egg. Sprinkle with poppy seeds if desired. Let raise and bake in hot oven until brown and crisp.

Fried Potato Biscuits

Ingredients

1 cup flour
1 cup cold mashed potatoes
½ tsp salt
1 oz. compressed yeast
Milk

Directions

Add salt and mashed potatoes to flour. Dissolve yeast in a little lukewarm milk. Mix everything together and add enough milk to make a biscuit-like dough. Roll out about ½ inch thick. Cut into 2-inch squares. Let rise. Fry to golden brown in deep, hot fat.

French Toast

Ingredients

6 slices stale bread
2 eggs
½ tsp salt
2/3 cup milk

Directions

Beat the eggs slightly. Add salt and milk. Dip the bread in the mixture. Brown the bread on a hot, well-buttered griddle. Serve hot with cinnamon and sugar or syrup.

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Whole Wheat Muffins

Ingredients

1 ½ cups whole wheat flour
½ cup white flour
3 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
¼ cup sugar
1 egg
1 cup milk
2 TB butter, melted

Directions

Mix dry ingredients. Add well-beaten egg and the butter. Beat well. Bake in buttered muffin tins 25 to 30 minutes in hot oven.

Twin Mountain Muffins

Ingredients

1/3 cup butter
¼ cup sugar
¼ tsp salt
1 egg
¾ cup milk
2 cups flour
4 tsp baking powder
1 cup berries such as blackberries or blueberries

Directions

Cream the butter. Add the sugar gradually, then alternately the egg beaten and mixed with the milk and flour sifted with the baking powder. Add berries and mix. Bake in buttered muffin pans about 25 minutes.

Dutch Apple Cake

Ingredients

2 cups flour
3 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
3 TB butter or shortening
1 egg
2/3 cup milk
4 sour apples
2 TB sugar
Cinnamon

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Dutch Apple Cake (continued)

Directions

Mix and sift the dry ingredients. Work in butter or shortening with tips of fingers, or cut in with knives. Add milk with well-beaten egg, gradually mixing with knife. Dough must be soft enough to spread in a shallow baking pan. Have ready the apples pared, cored and cut into quarters. When dough has been spread in pan, press apples into dough in parallel rows. Sprinkle apples with sugar and cinnamon. Bake in hot oven for ½ hour.

Baking Powder Biscuits

Ingredients

2 cups flour
4 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
¾ to 1 cup milk or water
2 TB shortening or butter

Directions

Sift dry ingredients together. Rub the butter into the flour with tips of fingers. Mix the milk into the flour with a knife, adding milk gradually until soft and handled easily. Put on floured board and roll until ½ inch thick. Cut into small rounds and bake in hot oven 10 to 15 minutes. Use as little flour as possible on the board when shaping the dough.

Rhubarb Pudding

Ingredients

2 cups rhubarb, cut in ½ inch pieces
1 egg
2/3 cup sugar
Baking powder biscuit crust

Directions

Beat egg lightly. Add sugar and rhubarb. Pour this mixture into buttered baking dish. Cover with Baking Powder Biscuit dough (recipe above). Bake in hot oven until brown.

Cereal & Bread Recipes (continued)

Bread Griddle Cakes

Ingredients

1 ½ cups fine bread crumbs
1 ½ cups hot milk
2 TB butter
2 eggs
½ cup flour
½ tsp salt
3 ½ tsp baking powder

Directions

Mix in the order given above. One cup cooked cereal may be used instead of bread crumbs. Drop by spoonfuls on a greased hot griddle. Brown well on both sides. Serve with butter and honey, molasses or syrup.

Bread Omelet

Ingredients

2 TB bread crumbs
Pinch salt
Pinch pepper
2 TB milk
1 egg
½ tsp butter

Directions

Soak bread crumbs in milk for 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper. Separate egg yolk and white and beat until light. Add yolk to bread and milk and cut in the white. Turn in the heated buttered pan and cook until set. Fold and turn on heated dish.

French Pancakes

Ingredients

3 eggs, separated
¼ cup flour
½ tsp salt
1 cup cold water

Directions

Sir yolks with salt and flour until smooth. Add milk gradually, then fold in beaten whites. Heat pan. Add 2 TB butter. Once hot, pour in a pancake. Let cook slowly and evenly on one side, then finish baking in oven.

Soups

Soup Stock

Ingredients

2 lbs beef shank, preferably ½ meat and ½ fat and bone
2 qts cold water
2 tsp salt
1 small onion
½ small carrot
½ small turnip
1 sprig parsley
1 piece celery

Directions

Cut meat into small pieces. Place meat and salt into cold water and let stand for 30 minutes. Simmer for 5 hours. Add vegetables cut into small pieces with seasoning. Cook another hour. Strain and cool. Remove fat if desired, then bring to boil when ready to use, adding more salt if needed.

Chicken Soup

Ingredients

3 to 4 lbs chicken
3 to 4 qts water
1 TB salt
1 onion
2 stalks celery, diced
½ tsp pepper
1/8 tsp nutmeg

Directions

This recipe works well with an old hen. Singe, clean and joint the bird, then salt and let stand several hours or overnight. Put on to a boil in cold water and let it come to a boil quickly. Skim thoroughly if you want a clear soup. Let simmer slowly 3 or more hours. Add vegetables and boil another hour. Strain and remove the fat. Add seasoning to taste. Serve soup hot with noodles or dumplings.

Barley Soup

Ingredients

2 qts soup stock
½ cup pearl barley
1 qt boiling water
1 tsp salt
1/8 tsp pepper
1 cup croutons, optional

Soup Recipes (continued)

Barley Soup (continued)

Directions

Wash barley in cold water and then cook in 1 quart of boiling salted water until tender, 2 or more hours. When water has evaporated, add soup stock. If you are making fresh soup, keep adding the "top soup," strained, to the barley and let boil until tender. One-half cup celery root or stalks, and ½ cup carrot, diced, boiled with the barley improves the flavor.

Milk Soup

Ingredients

2 TB butter
4 TB flour
1 quart hot milk, or milk and water mixed
1 tsp salt

Directions

Brown the butter, then add the flour and salt. Pour some of the hot milk over the butter mixture, constantly stirring. Add the rest of the milk. Season to taste. Serve with noodles or dumplings if desired. Rye flour may be used in place of wheat flour. One to 2 egg yolks may be added very gradually just before serving.

Tomato Soup

Ingredients

1 Can or Quart of tomatoes
1 pint water
4 cloves
1 slice of onion
2 tsp sugar
1 tsp salt
1/8 tsp baking soda
2 TB butter
2 TB flour

Directions

Cook the first six ingredients together for 20 minutes. Strain, reheat, add the soda, melt the butter, add the flour, then lastly gradually add the hot strained tomatoes.

Recommended Resources

For more information about Depression Era living, including homesteading, gardening, self-sufficiency, and frugal living, be sure to check out the resources below.

[The Homestead Kitchen Course](#)

Learn traditional self-sufficiency skills through this ten-module, self-paced eCourse. Find out how to source, preserve, and prepare seasonal, local meals that start in the garden, market, freezer, and pantry.



[The Herbal Academy](#)

The Herbal Academy teaches the art and science of herbalism. The Academy is dedicated to promoting a lifestyle of wellness and vitality through the use of herbs, sound nutrition, and optimal health practices. Experience high quality and affordable herbal courses, including introduction to herbs, wildcrafting, and more!



[The \\$5 Meal Plan](#)

Delicious food, simple to prepare, with inexpensive and healthy natural ingredients.

