

Hard Tack

It's not just the ingredients! It's how you make it that makes it last without refrigeration.

Measure out about two cups of flour and have a cup of water handy. Put the flour in a mixing bowl, and mix in the water a little at a time until you've got a dough. You may use more or less water – you mix until it's a dough, NOT until you use all the water.

Optional ½ tablespoon salt and/or ½ tablespoon sugar

Preheat your oven to **350 degrees**.

Next roll your dough out, about ¼ inch thick (Thicker if you want to be more historical but harder on the teeth). **It helps to do the rolling on a floured surface.**

Next cut the dough into squares – BIGGER than modern saltine crackers. Use a fork to prick holes in the tops of the squares; **three rows of four tine holes looks about right.** (I think the holes let steam escape.) Put the squares on a cookie sheet.

Baking

Bake at 350 degrees for the first 15 minutes.

Then **turn the oven down to 250 and continue to bake another 30 minutes**

Then **down to 200 and watch for another 30 minutes. Flip them with a spatula during this process.**

Bake until it's hard, and either still white or just begins to turn color from white NOT burned (**in other words, watch your hardtack, don't just set the timer**).

NOW here's a secret to baking hard bread.

The next day, give your hardtack a second baking at a lower temperature, about 225 degrees for 30-45 minutes. Reason: the second baking finishes drying it out. One baking is not enough, short of burning the food.

After the first baking, or if you package it up too soon, the bread will “sweat” as it cools, making it possible to mold. This “sweating” probably explains why an earlier hardtack message talked about not packaging it in plastic. Rest assured: if you bake twice and let it cool first, you can package hardtack in gallon baggies and it will keep at least six months.

Also note - there's no sense badmouthing hardtack. “Tack” was a period slang expression for any bad food. Think of it as wheat chips – without the oil and salt which make potato chips junk food. I suspect a lot of those 19th century farm boys just weren't prepared to like anything which wasn't Mama's home baked bread. In other words, recruits were not much different from their great-great grandchildren in this century. Of course, some hard bread was evidently either not baked twice or wetted in shipment, and molded or was infested with weevils. But if you think about it, the weevils' eggs can't have survived the baking process, so it was a packaging problem.