

## Acorns and Acorn Bread

<http://www.jackmtn.com/acornbread.html>

On a windy day in September I took time out from work to go on a day hike with two friends, Dave and Eric. We climbed Mt. Megunticook in Camden, and traversed some of the nearby trails. Eric and I stopped often to stuff some of the abundant acorns into my daypack. This year (1997) there seems to be a good crop of acorns. Some people say that a lot of acorns mean the winter will be a harsh one.

Acorns and oaks have a multitude of uses. All types of acorns throughout the country are edible. In south coastal Maine, where I live, the most predominant oak is the Red Oak. Acorns from the Red Oak group have a lot of tannic acid in them that must be leached out to make them edible. Although the leaf shapes of the trees in the Red Oak category vary somewhat, the end of the leaf lobes on all of these oaks are pointed. All of the oaks in the White Oak group have leaves with the ends of the lobes rounded. Acorns from the White Oak group need little or no processing. They have a low tannic acid content, and are naturally sweet. I've been in areas of Arizona where most of the oaks were sweet and I was able to pick the acorns off the ground and eat them as a tasty ready-to-go treat.

There are several reasons White Oaks are few and far between in my neck of the woods. They can take as long as fifty years to produce acorns. When the acorns fall to the ground they are the preferred food of many animals including deer, turkeys, grouse, squirrels, chipmunks and more. Squirrels are known to eat the White Oak acorns first and bury the Red Oak acorns for later in the winter or spring. Over time some of the bitterness is leached out of the acorns by the moisture in the ground, aided by snowmelt and rain.

In some areas of the country, even in recent history, acorns were a staple food for native peoples. Over the course of history it has been estimated that many more millions of tons of acorns have been consumed by humans than wheat, rice, and other grains.

Acorns can easily be processed into nutritious flour. First they must be shelled. A fist sized rock works great as a nutcracker. After I shell them I like to crush the acorn meats into smaller pieces before boiling. This allows the tannic acid to be leached out more quickly.

Take the shelled, crushed acorn meats and put them into a pot of already boiling water. As the acorns boil the water will become discolored. When the water is dark brown (every ten minutes or so of boiling), strain out the acorn meats and switch them to another pot of already boiling water. Continue this process until the nutmeats no longer taste bitter. I generally do 3 or 4 water changes. The amount of boiling you do will vary depending on your acorns and your patience. I've made sweet tasting acorn bread with acorn meal that still had some bitterness to it. Experiment.

When switching the acorns from one pot of water to another, make sure the water is boiling before adding the acorns. Switching the acorns from boiling water to cold water seems to lock in the bitterness. When most of the bitterness is gone from the nutmeats, the meats can be crushed into a meal or mush. The wet meal can be used right away in a bread recipe, or dried and stored as flour is. It will keep as long as flour does if kept dry.

I mix a lighter flour such as cattail or wheat flour with the acorn meal when making bread. Acorn flour is heavy and the bread may fall apart if not made of a mixture of flours. White flour, corn flour, and soy flour all will do.

Another way to leach out tannins from acorns is to put them in a mesh sack and leave them in a running stream for a week or so. The length of time and results will vary depending on the acorns, the water temperature and flow rate, and other factors.

If you use the boiling method don't throw away the brown water. This water is a tannic acid solution that has a variety of uses. It can be used as a dye for clothing. When used this way it needs a fixer or the color will fade after washing. The tannic acid can also be used as a laundry detergent. Put a couple of cups of the solution in each load of wash. It cleans well, and the clothing will smell great, but it will color whites a slightly tan color.

The solution is antiviral and antiseptic. It can be used as a skin wash for rashes, skin irritations, burns, poison ivy, cuts, etc. It can be gargled for sore throats or taken as a mild tea for diarrhea and dysentery, or used externally on hemorrhoids. Store jars of tannic acid solution in jars in the refrigerator. If mold forms on top after time, the solution can be reboiled to kill the mold and stored again.

Animal hides can be tanned more easily by soaking them in the tannic acid from the acorns. Hide tanning is the process of making a raw animal skin into a comfortable, pliable, durable piece of clothing. The use of the boiled brown acorn water in producing "tanned" hides is why we call this water tannic acid.

I've used the following basic acorn bread recipe often. I've also varied it quite a bit depending on the availability of ingredients. Some of the most delicious acorn bread I've made has been using only acorns, syrup, flour, and water. Good Luck.

- 2 cups acorn flour
- 2 cups cattail or white flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/3 cup maple syrup or sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Bake in pan for 30 minutes or until done at 400 degrees

Using the ingredients given above will produce a sweet, moist, nutty bread. The ingredients can be varied to produce different types of bread or muffins or pancakes, etc. Acorn bread is highly nutritious. It has an energy giving combination of protein, carbohydrates, and fat. John Muir called dry acorn cakes "the most compact and strength giving food" he had ever used. I use maple syrup from the trees in my woods instead of sugar. Not only do I enjoy the wild beauty and fiery colors of the maples and oaks that surround my farm, but I also savor the sweet acorn bread made from their nuts and sap. What better way is there to get to know the trees than to live under them and eat from their bounty?

### **Acorn Bread**

Categories: Native amer Breads

Yield: 1 Loaf

1 cup Acorn meal  
1 cup Flour  
2 tablespoon Baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon Salt  
3 tablespoon Sugar  
1 Egg, beaten  
1 cup Milk  
3 tablespoon Oil

Sift together, acorn meal, white flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. In separate bowl, mix together egg, milk, and oil. Combine dry ingredients and

liquid ingredients. Stir just enough to moisten dry ingredients. Pour into a greased pan and bake at 400F. for 30