

Iron Age Recipes

Snacks

Griddle Cakes

Ingredients

250g wholemeal flour
100g lard or butter
1 egg (optional)
3 to 6 tbsp milk
Pinch of salt

This is a basic savoury recipe. To liven it up add some herbs, onions, leeks or other greens.

Preparation

Combine the flour and salt in a bowl then add the lard or butter and rub in with your fingers until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs.

Stir in the egg (if using) then add just enough milk to bring the mixture together as a firm dough.

Pinch off pieces of the dough, shape into balls about 4cm in diameter then flatten into patties about 0.5cm thick.

Heat your griddle or frying pan and grease lightly with butter.

Add the griddle cakes and fry until nicely browned on both sides and cooked through, about 5 minutes per side, but the exact time will depend on your cooker.

These make an excellent accompaniment to any savoury dish.

To make a sweet version add 2 tbsp honey when you add the milk.

Oatcakes

Ingredients

500g medium-ground oatmeal
250g stone-ground (or coarse) bread wheat flour (use emmer or spelt flour to be more authentic; these can now be found in health-food shops and some supermarkets)
60g lard
1 tsp sea salt
Water to mix

Preparation

In a large bowl, mix the flour and oatmeal together then add the salt along with a teaspoon of water and mix in well.

Cut the lard into small cubes, add to the bowl and rub into the mixture with your fingers.

Once the lard has mixed with the flour add just enough water to make a dry dough and shape into small cakes about 0.5 to 1cm thick.

Cook these cakes on a griddle or frying pan until lightly browned on both sides then set aside to cool.

Once cool serve with cheese.

Fruited Bread

Ingredients

500g stone-ground or coarse wholemeal bread flour
300g soft fruit (blackberries preferably)
250g honey
1 tsp salt
Water to mix

Preparation

Tip the flour into a large bowl, add the blackberries and stir thoroughly together.

Next add the salt and honey and fold gently into the mixture using a metal spoon.

Finally add enough water to form a firm dough.

Tear small balls from the mixture, pressing these down into rounds of about 1.5cm in thickness which can be cooked on a griddle or frying pan until golden brown on both sides.

Alternatively you can shape the dough into a single large round loaf which can be cooked in an oven pre-heated to 170°C (Gas 3) for an hour or until the loaf turns a firm golden-brown colour.

Savoury Bean Fritters

Ingredients

120g butter
70g chopped, roasted, hazelnuts
1 bunch of sea beet or fat hen greens, chopped (you can also use Swiss chard or spinach)
1 handful of freshly-grated horseradish (or use a couple of tablespoons from a jar)
500g processed Celtic Beans (see below)
1 egg
Pinch of salt
Strong wholemeal bread flour

Celtic Beans:

Use one third dried black-eyed peas to two thirds dried broad (fava) beans.

Soak the beans overnight then drain and place in a large saucepan.

Cover with plenty of water, bring to the boil and cook for at least 3 hours.

Take off the heat, cover, and allow them to cool in the water.

You now need to remove the hard skins from the beans.

Alternatively you can use tinned beans!

Preparation for the fritters

Melt a little butter in a pan and use to gently fry the hazelnuts and sea beet (spinach) until wilted.

Take off the heat and transfer to a bowl.

Mix in the horseradish and beans then add the egg.

Stir to combine then season with salt and add just enough flour to bring the ingredients together as a stiff dough.

Shape the dough into rissoles (sausage shapes about 3cm in diameter and 6cm long), melt the remaining butter in a large pan and fry the shaped rissoles until browned all over.

These can be served either hot or cold.

Sweet Bean Cakes

Ingredients

250g butter
500g processed Celtic Beans (see above)
200g roasted hazelnuts, ground to a flour
350g strong wholemeal bread flour (or acorn flour)
500ml honey

Preparation

Prepare the Celtic Beans as per the recipe above.

Sift the flour into a bowl then rub in the butter with your fingertips until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs.

Stir in the beans and hazelnuts and add the honey.

Mix to a stiff batter.

Drop heaped tablespoons of the mixture onto a hot, lightly-greased griddle and cook until lightly-browned on both sides (about 6 minutes per side).

Main Courses

Clay-baked Birds

Ingredients

1 small bird (grouse, pheasant, partridge, woodcock, pigeon etc) gutted but with feathers still on
Wild garlic, leeks or onions, finely chopped
Clay

Preparation

Stuff the prepared (but unplucked) bird with the garlic, leek or onions.

Put the bird onto a layer of clay placed on a layer of foil in a baking dish.

Use more clay to completely cover the bird then place in a hot oven pre-heated to 200°C (Gas 6).

Bake for between 30 and 60 minutes (depending on the size of the bird) then turn the bird over onto its back (this both keeps the breast moist and ensures even cooking) and continue cooking for a further 30 to 60 minutes.

At the end of this time the clay will be hard. Break it open and remove the clay (this will take away the feathers and skin, leaving clean flesh inside. Serve hot.

Clay baking is the forerunner of modern *en crouete* cookery where pastry or bread is used to coat the meat before cooking.

Boiled Nettle Pudding

Ingredients

4 tbsp finely chopped sorrel
1 bunch watercress, finely chopped
½ cup young dandelion leaves, washed and finely chopped
½ cup young nettle leaves, washed and finely chopped
4 tbsp chives, finely chopped
240g barley flour
½ tsp sea salt, or to taste
Water or beer to mix

Preparation

Place the flour and salt in a large bowl then add the finely-chopped herbs and mix together thoroughly with a fork.

Add just enough water (or for a different flavour you can substitute beer) so that the mixture comes together as a stiff dough.

Tip the dough into the centre of a muslin cloth which then needs to be drawn-up tightly around the pudding before being securely tied off at the top with string.

Leave enough string free so that it's easy to pull the pudding out of the pot when it's cooked.

Add the pudding to a pot of simmering meat or vegetable stock. If you have got a piece of meat that also needs to be cooked you could add that to the pot too but it's not crucial.

Leave the pudding to cook for at least two hours.

Leave the pudding to cool slightly, remove the muslin then cut the pudding into thick slices with a knife and serve as you would a slice of bread.

Smoked Fish Stew

Ingredients

125g bacon chopped
2 leeks chopped
500g of any smoked fish, chopped into bite sized pieces
1 litre milk
240ml single cream
2 tbsp chives, finely chopped
1 tsp salt

Preparation

Fry the bacon until the fat is released then add the leeks and cook until tender.

Add the fish and cover with the milk.

Slowly cook until the fish is cooked through, about 30 minutes.

Pour in the cream and add the chopped chives and salt.

Wild Boar Stew

Ingredients

1kg wild boar meat (or pork), cubed
4 carrots, roughly sliced
1/2 cabbage, shredded
200g baby onions
2 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
2 tbsp fresh parsley chopped
2 bayleaves
10 juniper berries, crushed
10 tbsp olive oil (or animal dripping)
800ml heather ale or mead
2 tbsp honey
200g pearl barley

Preparation

The day before place the meat in a dish with the ale, juniper berries and herbs and place in the fridge and allow to marinade over night.

The following day drain the meat (but reserve the liquid), add the oil to a metal casserole dish, add the vegetables and meat and fry until the meat has browned.

Add the reserved ale, bring to a boil then add the honey and pearl barley.

Boil vigorously until the volume has reduced by a third.

Reduce the heat, half cover the casserole and allow to simmer gently for about two and a half hours, until the meat is completely tender.

At this stage remove the meat, turn the heat to high and boil vigorously until the sauce thickens.

Return the meat to the pot, allow to re-heat for 10 minutes and serve in bowls with a good hunk of bread or nettle pudding.

Pit-oven Cooked Vegetables

Ingredients

2kg mixed root vegetables (many of these weren't available in the Iron Age and this technique would have been used mostly for meat but this recipe avoids any possibility of food poisoning!)

Herbs

Dock leaves or burdock leaves

Grass

Preparation

To form the oven dig a shallow pit (about 80cm deep) that is bowl shaped and large enough to contain your meat and vegetables.

Line the sides and base of the pit with large stones.

Carefully store the earth removed from the pit to the side (this will be used to cover the pit to allow the steam to stay inside).

Build a large fire over the stones and set light to it.

Allow the fire to burn down to embers and when the fire has gone out carefully brush away any remaining wood (be careful doing this as the stones will be *very* hot).

While the fire is burning down collect your greens (you will need lots). Dock leaves, burdock leaves, long grasses and reeds are excellent.

When the fire has been cleared cover the hot stones with plenty of the collected leaves.

Scrub your vegetables, put on top of the leaves covering the rocks then strew some herbs over the top.

Now cover with another thick layer of leaves ensuring that there are no gaps.

Make certain everything is covered, so that when you re-cover the pit with the soil you removed earlier, no soil will reach the steaming food inside.

Tamp down the soil and, if applicable, put the sods of turf on top (this seals the oven so that the food inside steams slowly).

Most root vegetables will take about 4 hours to cook in this way.

Barley Bread with Beer

Ingredients

500g barley flour
500g stone-ground wheat flour
1 tsp salt
250g butter
Beer to mix

Preparation

In a large bowl mix the flours and salt together and rub in the butter.

Add enough beer to make a soft dough and shape into small cakes.

Cook on a hot stone (a griddle or frying pan will also be fine) until firm.

This is a very light bread because of the addition of the beer and is very good with cheese.

Desserts

Cream, Seasonal Fruit and Honey

Ingredients

200ml cream (cow, sheep or goat)

300g soft fruit (blackberries, wild strawberries, blackcurrants, raspberries, elderberries, gooseberries, bilberries or blueberries or any other soft fruit). Alternatively in spring you could use sweet flowers such as elder, hawthorn gorse, violet, heather, primrose, rose or clover and in later autumn you can use sweet nuts such as hazel or beech.

Sufficient honey to drizzle over the top

Sprig of mint to decorate

Preparation

Put the fruit/flowers/nuts (or any mixture thereof) in a bowl, pour the cream over the top then drizzle the honey over the top of this.

A simple, tasty and very seasonal dessert.

Poppy Seed and Blackberry Cake

Ingredients

360g poppy seeds, ground

6 duck eggs (hen eggs will also do)

250ml honey

130g blackberries (or any other seasonal fruit)

Preparation

All cakes need flour of some kind and this is no different. If you're being authentic then grind the poppy seeds into flour using a quern. However, using a coffee grinder works equally well!

Once you have the poppy seed flour, tip it into a bowl. Ground poppy seeds can often be found in Eastern European Deli's too.

Crack the eggs and separate the yolks and white into separate bowls. Beat the yolks until thick then continue beating as you add the honey to the mixture a little at a time.

Next, stir in the blackberries (or whatever fruit you're using) and the poppy seed flour.

Finally, beat the egg whites until they form into stiff peaks and gently fold the whites into the fruit and poppy seed mixture using a metal spoon.

Gently pour the resulting batter into a lightly greased and floured ovenproof dish or cake tin.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 170°C (Gas 3) for about 50 minutes (or until the cake has set).

Allow the cake to cool in its dish or tin, tip out, slice and serve with cream and a sprig of mint.

Drinks

Nettle Tea

Ingredients

1 tbsp dried nettle leaves
1 cup water
1 tbsp honey or sugar (optional)

Preparation

Put the dried nettles in a mug.

Add boiling water and cover with a plate to steep for 15 minutes.

Strain into a clean mug and add honey to taste.

Mead

Ingredients

1.36kg honey for dry mead (1.8kg for medium and 2.25kg for sweet)
3g tannin or a cup of cold tea
10g citric acid
8g yeast nutrient or 2 nutrient tablets
A sachet of sherry type yeast

Preparation

Prepare the yeast starter in advance to activate the yeast following the manufacturer's instructions.

Place the honey in the initial fermentation vessel or bucket, and make up to 4.5 litres with hot water.

Stir well with a long handled wooden or plastic spoon until the honey has dissolved.

When cool 21°C (70°F) add the tannin, nutrient and acid, and stir well to dissolve, and then add the activated yeast.

Cover closely with either a lid or clingfilm.

After 7 days transfer into a demijohn, topping up to the shoulder with cooled boiled water if necessary.

Fit a bung and airlock and set aside in a warm place to ferment.

Initially bubbles of air will come through the airlock, this is supposed to happen!

When the mead stops bubbling it will start to become clearer.

When the mead falls star bright (is really clear) it is ready to bottle.

When bottling make sure that you leave the sediment in the demijohn and not get it into the bottles, use a siphon if possible.

Drink and enjoy!