

# How to Make Hardtack

` Estimated reading time: 10 minutes

# HOW TO MAKE HARDTACK



**(EASY WAY TO STORE  
FLOUR LONG-TERM)**

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I'll never forget the time when I opened up a new bag of flour only to discover it was full of tiny little bugs! Flour bugs are generally weevils, and while they aren't terrible, you really don't want to eat flour that is heavily infested with them.

One way to prevent bugs from getting in your flour is to store it in your freezer. But if your freezer is full like mine, you'll need another solution.

Hardtack is a great way to 'store' your flour for emergency purposes. It's very easy to make and can last for decades when stored properly. While you won't be using hardtack to make cakes and cookies, it can be a good source of carbohydrates and calories in your diet. You don't need to do any prep work once it is made – just dip it in coffee, dunk it in your soup, or soak it in milk for a cracker-like food.

The first hardtack was probably made in ancient Rome. Later, it was used during the American Civil War for food rations.

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## What Is Hardtack?

Hardtack is a simple food made from flour, salt, and water. It's baked until hard and dry. With such a low moisture content, the hardtack can store for long periods of time – even decades. Hardtack has a bland flavor like a plain cracker.

The name hardtack is a throwback to the British slang for food. It was known as tack. So hard tack literally means hard food. You'll want to remember this when you eat it. You can't just bite into a piece of hardtack – it's too hard! You'll want to give it a good soak in water, milk, soup, coffee, or tea before taking a bite.

# Basic Hardtack



Basic hardtack is made from just 3 simple ingredients:

- Flour
- Salt
- Water

After measuring your ingredients, you mix them together, roll them out, and bake them. You can use it as food right away, take it backpacking, or store it for the long term.

Here's how to make the basic hardtack:

## How to Make Hardtack

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour



### Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup water
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons salt

1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.



2. Mix the ingredients until it forms a thick dough. You want the dough to have a drier consistency. If it feels sticky, add a little bit of flour.



3. Sprinkle some flour on your countertop before you place your dough down so that it doesn't stick.



I added some basil and oregano to my dough because I want to use my hardtack in soups and stews. Just knead it into the dough a little bit to mix it through. You could also add dry ingredients to the flour ahead of time, if you prefer.



4. Using a rolling pin, roll out your dough until it is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick or even a little thinner. Make sure it is as even as possible so that your wafers will cook evenly.



5. Cut your dough into cracker-like squares. If you're feeling creative, you could use cookie cutters to create interesting shapes, although this isn't necessary at all. The more uniform the size and shape, the better the hardtack will bake. I don't worry too much about how my hardtack looks, but I do like to make smaller, thinner cracker-sized pieces. I used a pizza cutter to cut my dough, but you could use a knife or spatula. Just make sure you cut it before you bake it.



6. Place your raw hardtack on an ungreased cookie sheet and poke holes into each piece with a toothpick.



7. Bake for 30 minutes at 375 degrees Fahrenheit.

8. Carefully turn your wafers over and bake them for another 30 minutes or until they are a light, golden brown. Mine took about 45 minutes total, but if your wafers are thicker they may take a little longer.

9. Your wafers should be evenly browned. You can remove them from the oven and place them on a cooling rack or turn off the oven and leave them to cool in the oven itself. The idea is to remove as much moisture as possible without burning the hardtack. This will help your hardtack store for longer.



10. Store your hardtack away from moisture. I like to put mine in mason jars. Hardtack with no add-ins should last indefinitely under the right storage conditions.



11. To use your hardtack, soak it for 10 minutes in milk, coffee, soup, or even water. I am using mine to thicken up some chicken broth and to add extra calories, just like a cracker.

## Hardtack Variations

If you don't like boring hardtack, you can make all kinds of variations! Keep in mind that your hardtack will only last as long as the foods you add. For example, you could easily add in raisins or other dried fruits or nuts to your hardtack, but it will shorten the shelf life.

Spices and sweeteners can be added, and they probably won't affect the shelf life as much as fruits or nuts would. You'll want to consider how you'll be using your hardtack before

adding in any additional ingredients. Here are a few examples.

## Hardtack Crackers

If you plan on eating your hardtack as a cracker with soup or stew, you may want to leave them plain or add in some savory ingredients such as:

- Oregano
- Basil
- Nutmeg (for squash soups)

## Hardtack Pancakes

If you want to store hardtack to later make into pancakes, you can mix in some sweeter type fixings. To make hardtack pancakes, you'll crush your hardtack up into a fine powder. Then, you can mix it with water, milk, and even some eggs. Fry it in a skillet with a little oil to make a pancake. You may want to add:

- Sugar
- Cinnamon
- Dried fruit
- Nuts

Keep in mind that adding in nuts or dried fruit shortens the shelf life, but it does make an excellent food source for backpacking or short-term storage.

## Hardtack Pudding

If you're looking for something sweet, you may want to consider hardtack pudding. You'll want to crumble up your hardtack into tiny bits, then mix it with butter, sugar, and milk. Let it soak until it's soft, then stir it up into a

pudding-style dessert. If you are storing your hardtack for pudding, you can include the following:

- Sugar
- Cinnamon
- Nutmeg
- Allspice
- Dried fruits or nuts

## **Hardtack on the Go**

If you are hiking, camping, or bugging out, you may not have time to stop and create a meal from your hardtack. Instead, just break off small pieces and suck on them until they are soft enough to chew. Just don't bite them right away, or you might break a tooth!

No matter how you are going to use your hardtack, you'll want to make sure that it is good and soft before you bite into it. If you want to use it as is, just soak it in some coffee, tea, milk, or water before you eat it. It may take up to 10 minutes for your hardtack to be soft enough to eat.



## How to Store Hardtack

Hardtack is very easy to store because of its low moisture content. If you are going to store it for short-term use, such as hiking or camping, just stash it away in an air-tight container or sandwich bag to keep it moisture-free. You can easily carry it in a pocket or backpack.

For long-term storage, you'll want to make sure the hardtack is very, very dry. Then, you can store it in sealed mylar bags with oxygen absorbers. Store the mylar bags in food-safe 5-gallon buckets. Keep the buckets in a cool, dry place, and your hard tack can last for up to 25 years.

## Hardtack Tips to Remember

Hardtack is a very inexpensive and easy food to make! Go ahead and experiment with different types of add-ins or different

types of flour. Remember that hardtack needs to be very dry for long-term storage and it will only last for as long as the ingredients you add. Adding dried fruit or nuts means your hardtack will probably only last a few months at best.

For best results, keep your dough a uniform thickness before baking. I find that thinner hardtack is easier to manage than thicker pieces.

Always visually inspect your hardtack before use, especially if you're adding in extra ingredients.

Never bite directly into a piece of hardtack. Make sure you to soak it or prepare it by some other method so that it is soft and edible.

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- Baking sheet

- 2 cups flour
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 1/2 tsps. salt

1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
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