

**The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive  
Center**

**Activity  
Oregon Trail Cooking**



# National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

## Oregon Trail Cooking

Native Americans and trappers could survive by “living off the land,” but the pioneer had to depend largely on what he could pack in his wagon.

The pioneers had to turn to the experts to discover what to take with them on the long trip and what items were best left behind. The pioneers read the following books by those individuals who had survived the Oregon Trail experience. They included:

*Journal of Travels Over The Rocky Mountains*

Joel Palmer

*The Prairie Traveler*

Randolph B. Marcy

*The Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California*

Lansford Hastings

*Route Across the Rocky Mountains*

Overton Johnson and William H. Winter

*The Emigrants Guide to California*

Joseph W. Ware

These books were the best sellers of the time and gave advice ranging from the types of cooking utensils to take to the amount of flour needed for a family of five.

Nonperishable foods were a must. There was no refrigeration so pioneers had to rely on salted meats, pickled vegetables, dried fruit, beans and coffee.

Proper selection of food choices could mean the difference in surviving the trip. The wrong choices could cause serious illness or death. Planning of the diet made the long trip much more pleasant. A list of trip necessities that includes food can be found in this guide.

The following are simple recipes that can be incorporated into your Oregon Trail lesson plans in the classroom or as a home project with the assistance of adults.

### Soda Biscuits

Take 1 lb. of flour, and mix it with milk enough to make a stiff dough; dissolve in a little milk 1 teaspoon of carbonate of soda; add this to the paste with a teaspoon of salt. Work it well together, and roll it out thin; cut into round biscuits, and bake them in a moderate oven. The yolk of an egg is sometimes added. (Sarah J Hale, Mrs. Hales New Cookbook 1857)

# National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

## Oregon Trail Cooking

### Jerky

This method of making jerky allows for total student participation.

#### Ingredients:

lean meat  
seasoning salt

#### Equipment needed:

magazine or other padding  
paper towels  
wax paper  
butter knives

#### Directions:

Slice lean meat with the grain in 1/4 inch thick pieces. Meat is easier to slice if partially frozen. Remove as much fat as possible.

Every student should prepare his/her own padding with a magazine covered with a paper towel and wax paper. Lay sliced meat out on each students' padding.

Sprinkle meat with seasoning. This part of the project may be better administered by the teacher.

Give each student a butter knife and let them pound the meat gently with the handle to work in the seasoning and tenderize the meat. This part of the activity is going to need to be set up with signals for starting and stopping. Turn meat over and repeat pounding procedure.

Meat can then be placed directly into food dehydrator/dryer, or in a covered bowl and allowed to marinate until put into the oven. Some dehydrators don't give off enough heat to properly cure the meat. In this case, the oven cures the meat nicely. Place meat on racks in oven, crack the door to prevent steaming meat, set on lowest setting (about 150-200 degrees). Cure four or five hours with heat on, then let set overnight to dry.

This method produces jerky dry enough to keep indefinitely.

# National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center

## Oregon Trail Cooking

### Drying Fruit and Fruit Leather

Apples, apricots, plums, and a number of other fruits may be dried simply by slicing and placing in dehydrator for several hours. More information and the latest word on drying may be obtained at any county extension office.

Fruit leather may be made by washing and pitting fruit, putting it into a pan and bringing to a boil. Puree the fruit in blender, pour onto plastic wrap and place in food dehydrator. Be sure to leave room for air circulation. Dries in 24-36 hours. Peel off plastic, make roll-ups or tear into pieces.

### Trail Lemonade

To make this proper you want real vinegar, one with the “mother” in it. If you don’t already have it, ask around; it is like sharing and passing a sourdough starter. The lemon essence was often added to improve the flavor of brackish water found on the trail. This “lemonade” is refreshing. Some emigrants claimed that when ginger was added to cold water, a body could drink as much as one wanted without feeling bloated or get an achy stomach.

Start with 1 cup real vinegar

Add:   cup sugar (try raw sugar for a more authentic taste)

      2 oz. Lemon essence

      2-3 cups water

Stir until sugar is dissolved. Taste. Adjust sweetness to your liking

\*\*\*\*\*

### Lemon Pie

(also known as vinegar pie) bake a 9" pie shell. Allow to cool.

In pan/pot, stir together, then heat till boiling:

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup water

      1  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups sugar and pinch of salt

add to boiling mixture:  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup flour mixed well with  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cold water, stirring constantly until thick.

Remove from heat. Stirring quickly, add:

      4 egg yolks, beaten

      - $\frac{1}{2}$  cup real vinegar

      several dashes of fresh grated nutmeg

Return to heat, stirring constantly till mixture bubbles again, and thickens more. Remove from heat.

Stir in: 3 tablespoons butter, in pieces. Cool mixture till lukewarm. Pour in the pre-baked shell. You can serve pie as is, or top filling with a Meringue or a whipped cream topping.

Some would pour mixture into an **un-baked** pie shell then top with lattice work and bake for 10 minutes high heat then bake an additional 45 minutes at a medium heat. (350)