

Civil War Era Molasses Cookie Recipe (Directions adapted for Woodstove and Modern Oven)

Ingredients

- 1 cup brown sugar, packed
- 1 cup molasses
- 1 cup lard or shortening
- 1 egg
- ½ cup boiling water
- 1 teaspoon *saleratus* (period baking soda)
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4–5 cups all-purpose flour
- Extra sugar for rolling (optional)

Instructions

Prepare the dough

1. **Cream the fats and sugars:** In a large bowl, cream together the lard or shortening, brown sugar, molasses, and egg until the mixture is well blended.
2. **Combine leavening:** In a separate small bowl, dissolve the *saleratus* (baking soda) in the ½ cup of boiling water.
3. **Mix wet and dry ingredients:** Stir the *saleratus* mixture into the creamed ingredients. In a fresh bowl, whisk the flour, ginger, cinnamon, and salt.
4. **Finish the dough:** Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture, mixing until a pliable dough forms. The exact amount of flour can vary, so add just enough to make the dough easy to roll without being too stiff.

5. **Chill the dough:** Cover the bowl and place the dough in the cellar (or refrigerate the dough) for at least one hour. This makes it easier to handle and improves the cookie's texture.

Bake in a modern oven

1. **Preheat and prepare:** Preheat your oven to 375°F. Grease your cookie sheets or line with parchment paper.
2. **Roll and cut:** On a lightly floured surface, roll the chilled dough to about ¼-inch thickness. Use a round cutter to cut out cookies.
3. **Roll in sugar:** For a finishing touch, you can lightly roll the tops of the cookies in granulated sugar.
4. **Bake:** Place the cookies on the prepared sheet and bake for 8–10 minutes, or until the edges are firm and the tops puff slightly.

Baking in a wood stove

Baking in a wood stove requires close attention, as the temperature is not consistent.

1. **Heat the oven:** Get a steady, even fire going for about an hour before you plan to bake. You want a consistent bed of hot coals in the firebox to radiate heat.
2. **Monitor the temperature:** Use an oven thermometer to gauge the heat. The temperature in a wood stove oven is often hotter at the sides and back, so it's wise to place your cookies towards the center.
3. **Use a cloche or Dutch oven:** For the most even baking, place your cookie sheet inside a cast iron Dutch oven with a lid. Place three canning rings in the bottom to create space for air to circulate.
4. **Rotate for even cooking:** The oven's temperature will be uneven, so rotate the Dutch oven or cookie sheet 180° halfway through the baking time to prevent burning.
5. **Test for doneness:** Test the cookies for doneness with a toothpick. If the oven is too hot, the cookies can burn on the bottom while being raw in the middle. To prevent this, you can place a baking sheet under your cooling rack to reflect some of the intense radiant heat from the coals.