

No Refrigeration Required

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Can you eat period-appropriate food, and still feed a family? Absolutely! Just go for a No Refrigeration Required historic foods menu!

Why Non-Refrigeration?

Free yourself from a modern cooler, and you will become more portable, released from the eternal hunt for ice. Your food safety worries are reduced. You'll spend less time tending a fire, need less wood, increase fire safety... the benefits just keep going! You'll also avoid some modern intrusions, and be more able to educate your family and the public about historic eating habits.

Why Eat Period Foods?

First, and most obvious, is the time-travel aspect. It's hard to have a Magic Moment when you step out of the tent and find your kids munching on Pop Tarts (termed "soft tack" by living history wags).

Second, the educational aspect of period foods is large. Spectators are terribly curious about food—would you rather be able to say, "Yes, we're eating this cabbage with cured meat for dinner; it's the last bit from our root cellar, so I hope the army does not trample my garden before I can harvest greens later in the month!"; or, "Umm... no, Pizza Hut isn't period. But they do deliver when I order by cell phone."

Important Things To Consider

The most important menu item you can bring is water--good drinking water, and lots of it. Many events provide palatable water, but you run the risk of upsetting small tummies with unfamiliar water, which is never pleasant, but least of all needed at an event with public restrooms.

Water should be easily and freely available at all times. By limiting your child's consumption of juices and lemonade to one non-water, non-milk treat per day, you'll ensure they don't load up on potentially dehydrating, empty sugar drinks. Push water especially during hot events, during and after play. Explain why we need to drink so much, so they won't think you're trying to drown them.

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Figuring menus that require little to no refrigeration but still please a young palate can be a challenge. Start by making a list of what your family eats on a regular basis, then research how many foods are suited to the period (check food history and repro cooking books), and limited refrigeration. Consult your family on things they would like to eat, and try out some period recipes at home to introduce new foods. Again, here is where the family can have fun researching and trying era-appropriate recipes between events. You won't need a cooler for:

Fresh fruits and veggies, in season. Grow your own heirloom, period-appropriate varieties, or work with a local farmer's market to have in-season items. In fall and spring, root crops are a good choice: carrots, potatoes, and other roots do not need refrigeration. Vegetables offer water, fiber, nutrients, and are a good base for all your meals.

Dried beans. Soak these overnight at the event, and simmer with bits of salt pork for an easy one-pot meal. The meal contents will not need refrigeration before preparation, and the leftovers will go quickly if offered to campaigning soldiers.

If you would reasonably have access to chickens during the laying season, you can make **egg noodles** at any event; farm fresh eggs should be left unwashed, and kept in a cool location until use. Rinse eggs just before using. Boil the noodles in a soup made with fresh veggies and a bit of meat, and you have another one-pot meal. You might even pre-cook a bit of chicken, freeze it, and use the frozen, cooked meat in chicken soup the first day out—you won't need a cooler.

Bread can be baked at home, or made and baked in a dutch oven at the event, if camp cooking would be appropriate (this is actually fairly limited—if you're doing a frontier immigrant presentation, you'd be in a good spot; if you are refugees, it's less likely.)

Gingersnaps and other period cookies make wonderful treats. Keep them clean and dry; try muslin bags or cloth napkins.

Hard cheeses, such as cheddars, parmesans, and the like, kept wrapped in a cool spot, will keep well without true refrigeration. By then end of the time, they'll be a bit oily and softer, but the flavor will be great!

To store **meats** for two days, wrap the frozen cuts well in blank newsprint. On-site, dig a small pit somewhere in the shade and line it with straw. Add the wrapped frozen meats, cover with more straw, and pop the sod lid back on your mini-root cellar. Open your "cellar" only when necessary to keep the cool in, and you'll have fresh meat to thaw and cook all weekend. Preserved meats like bacon and sausages can also be stored this way, though true smoke-cured meats do not require it.

As to milk, my best advice is to skip it for a weekend. **Condensed milk** can be used for most cooking, and is good over hot cereals. (Remove modern labels, and use a simple "key" type can opener to punch a hole.) You might also consider carrying a little instant milk powder, and mixing up very small quantities as needed.

Breakfast ideas might include hot grain cereals of all kinds, breads and rolls, fruit, flapjacks, eggs, fried potatoes, preserved



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meats, biscuits or bread and gravies (from condensed or dry milk). Adding warm coffee and tea makes for a nice start to the day.

Lunch is simplest if you plan it cold. Slices of hard cheese, cold cooked meats or hard sausages, raw veggies and fruits, bread, nuts, and pickles, along with lots of cool water, makes it easy to "graze" the buffet or make a quick picnic. Jelly in stoneware crocks can be considered your emergency back-up meal plan (jelly sandwiches) for the stubborn hold-outs. Cold lunches also free you from having the cooking fire going 18 hours a day.

For **diners**, plan soup. The preparation for one-pot meals is minimal; you can rely on non-refrigerated soup ingredients, with small bits of perishables for accent only. Add bread or biscuits, and feed a dozen people with just a few pounds of vegetables and a gallon of water. (To avoid refrigerating leftovers, make sure single citizens and military men know you have them.)

A Few Recipes

Only items in *italic* require any amount of cold storage. Bean and Vegetable soups are taken from *The American Frugal Housewife*, by Mrs. Child.

Bean Soup

- 2 cups dried beans
- Water to cover

Simmer beans close to the coals (not in flames!) in water to cover until they have softened, several hours; be sure to check the pot fairly frequently, adding water as needed. Add seasonings, such as salt, pepper, a bit of tomato catsup (recipes for home bottling found in many period cookbooks), bay leaf, etc, in the last half-hour of cooking. Slightly smashing about half a cup of the cooked beans makes for a rich broth.

It may be odd to some to eat plain bean soup with no meat in it. One could certainly simmer a ham hock or salt pork with the beans, but the taste of beans with a bit of salt and pepper is really quite pleasant.

Vegetable Soup with Meat

This is truly a vegetable soup, with meat used only as a seasoning. It is a very adaptable recipe, easily expanded. Chop a variety of your favorite root vegetables (in season). Ingredients might include:

- Onion, garlic, celeriac (fry lightly)
- Carrot, leek, potato, parsnip, turnip
- Dried vegetables of all kinds

Add root vegetables to a pot, with water to cover plus about 3 inches. Simmer near the coals until veggies have become tender, then add a mix of other favorite veggies, in season, which might include:

- Celery (don't duplicate this if you've used celeriac.)
- Shelled fresh green peas

- Fresh green beans
- Fresh corn cut from the cob
- Diced tomato
- Fresh herbs, kale, cabbage

Add seasonings, such as salt, pepper, and other spices. Add a handful of bits of *cooked ham, chicken or beef, or sliced cured sausages* if you like, though this is not imperative. Add liquid to the soup throughout cooking, to keep all the veggies covered and suspended. Again, slight mashing enriches the broth.

Gingersnaps

(From *The New England Economical Housekeeper, 1845, on the Feeding America web archive.*)

- 1 cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- Flour to make a stiff dough.

Roll thin, cut into rounds, and bake in a quick (400°) oven.

Ginger Cakes

(from the same source)

Beat

- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup butter
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger,
- Flour to make a stiff dough.

Roll thin and cut rounds or squares. Bake in a quick oven as above.

Grandma Mary Beth's Chicken & Noodles

(From my Great Grandma Mary Beth, whose grandmother made it for her family in the war years.)

Boil *one chicken* with garlic, a quartered onion, and a stalk of celery. When the meat is tender, remove it from the bone and chop. Reserve broth, removing the solids.

Make egg noodles:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 egg beaten in 1/4 cup water
- Dash of salt and pepper

Make a mound of flour and seasonings on a board or table, with a well in the middle. Pour the egg mix into the well. With a fork or fingers, work the flour into the liquid, forming a stiff paste. Rest as needed to relax the dough. Roll out very thin (use flour to prevent sticking) and slice into noodles. Set aside, coated in flour, to dry slightly before cooking.

Lightly fry some garlic and onion (we were a smelly, disease-free family); add it to the broth. Chop and add carrots; bring the broth to a boil. Return chicken to the broth. Drop noodles a few at a time into the boiling broth: stir to prevent them clumping. Boil until noodles are tender all the way through, slightly plumped and "wrinkly" looking. Balance seasonings with salt and pepper.

Research your recipes, test them at home, and enjoy your No Refrigeration Required menus!



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