
Pioneer Recipes

Pioneers who lived a long time ago ate simpler meals. They had to use fresh food before it spoiled. Many families in early Elgin grew their own fruits and vegetables and kept a cow and chickens for milk and eggs. It was not easy to visit a store. Some families lived very far from town. Try these recipes and see what it was like to eat like a pioneer.

Pioneers used vinegar and spices to preserve vegetables and make them last longer. Pickles are cucumbers that have been preserved in vinegar. Try this easy recipe to make your own crunchy pickles.

Refrigerator Pickles

- 1 1/2 cups water
- 3 TB white vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 TB kosher, sea or pickling salt (not iodized table salt)
- 2 tsp black peppercorns
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled
- 6 large sprigs fresh dill (optional)
- 1 bay leaf (optional)
- 1/2 tsp crushed red pepper flakes, or more/less to taste (optional)
- 1 large cucumber, sliced into rounds or sticks

Add the water, vinegar, salt, peppercorns, garlic, dill and bay leaf to a 1 quart glass jar and stir to combine. Add the sliced cucumbers to the jar. Place the lid on the jar and shake to combine. Refrigerate for 1-2 days before eating. The pickles will keep in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.



Pioneers ate a lot of corn because it was easy to grow in poor quality soil. It was also easy to grind up into cornmeal. It was harder to grind wheat into flour. Many recipes used cornmeal like we use flour today. Try this easy recipe with a grown-up for a cornmeal pancake that can be eaten with syrup and butter.

Johnnycakes

- 3/4 cup milk
- 1 cup water
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 TB vegetable oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 cups yellow cornmeal
- 2 tsp sugar

Combine milk, water, eggs, oil and salt in mixing bowl. Add cornmeal and sugar; mix thoroughly. Drop by heaping tablespoonful on to a hot greased griddle or skillet. Fry on each side until golden brown, about 2 minutes.

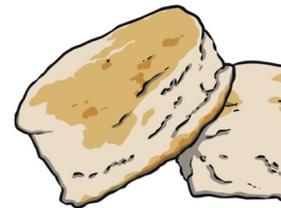


Of course, pioneers also liked to bake with flour. One of the first things built in Elgin was a mill that could grind wheat into flour. It was right on the Fox River and used water power to turn its grinding stones.

Baking Powder Biscuits

- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 TB sugar
- 1/3 cup shortening or butter
- 1 TB baking powder
- 1 cup milk

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Grease a baking sheet. Add flour, baking powder, salt and sugar to a bowl and mix together. Cut in the shortening/butter until the dough resembles coarse crumbs. Add half of the milk and mix. Add the remaining milk and mix again. Place on a floured surface and kneed gently 15-20 times. Pat the dough flat until its about a half inch thick. Cut out biscuits with a round cookie cutter or overturned drinking glass. Place on greased baking sheet and bake at 425 degrees for 13-15 minutes. Brush tops of biscuits with butter as they come out of the oven.



Sometimes pioneers had to be very creative because they ran out of supplies and there were no stores nearby. If you know a grown-up that likes coffee, tell them not to worry if they run out. Here is a recipe they can use.

Substitute Coffee

- 1 small bucket of ripe acorns (there's a big oak tree in Lords Park!)
- A little bit of bacon fat

Check the acorns for worm holes. Throw out the wormy ones. Boil the good ones in a pan of water for 30 minutes. This helps the outer shell pop off. Peel the acorns and throw away the shells. Fry the acorns in a pan with the bacon fat. Once they are fried and have cooled down, run them through your coffee grinder and brew with hot water. Delicious!

If your grown-up likes creamer in their coffee, but has run out of that too, let them know there is a way to fix that as well. They can take the white of an egg, whip it until its frothy and add a little lump of butter and then pour in their coffee. Problem solved!

