

Sea and Learn – Ship's Biscuits

The biscuits onboard HMS Victory were baked until they were very hard and they could be kept for a very long time. Sailors were allowed five biscuits each day. Sometimes the biscuits were mixed with sugar and water to make a breakfast. At other times they were pounded until they were crumbly then mixed with chopped meat to make a stew. Mixed with pork fat and sugar they could be made into a cake.

When the biscuits were very old, they attracted grain weevils. In very hot weather, the biscuits were often full of maggots! Sometimes the sailors ate their biscuits in the dark, or with their eyes closed so they could not see the maggots.

The flour used in the past was a mixture of wheat and pea flour. Most flour used today is milled in North America and therefore it is difficult to reproduce a ship's biscuit, which is completely authentic. However, by trying the following recipe you can create a biscuit of your own.

Ingredients

1 lb / 450g medium coarse stoneground wholemeal
Flour
¼ oz/ 7g Salt
Water

Method

1. Add water to the flour and salt until you get a stiff dough.
2. Leave for half an hour and then roll out very thickly.
3. Make into 5 biscuits.
4. Bake at gas mark 7 or 220°C for 30 minutes.
5. Remove from the oven and leave in a warm place to harden and dry out.