

Chuckwagon

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Navajo Fry Bread

When I was just a pint-size youngster, I had the privilege of attending the famous Bear Dance on the Ute Indian Reservation in Cortez, Colorado. Here, I was introduced to all sorts of wonderful things and I soon developed a healthy respect for our Native American cousins. For lunch, we had something I've never forgotten because even today, I order one of these treats every chance I get. I had my first Navajo Taco at the Bear Dance, and I thought I had gone to heaven! I watched carefully as a colorfully-dressed, little old Navajo woman molded some thickened batter into a mixture of flour and powdered milk. When the dough was just right, she fashioned a ball of dough between her palms, just a little larger than a large egg. Flattening it into a disk about 1/4" thick and about 9" in diameter, she laid the disk into an inch of hot, melted, shortening inside a Lodge cast-iron, black skillet. Later, I learned that the temperature of the hot shortening is the secret behind the creation, ensuring its success, or sealing its demise. It had to be 350°F. Any cooler and the dough would have become soggy with oil. Hotter oil, exceeding 350°, would have cooked the dough too quickly, burning it.

I watched the old woman carefully. She never did smile at me throughout the entire process. When the first side turned golden-brown, she flipped the bread over with a "Y" shaped stick – forerunner to tongs, I guess. Amazingly, she did not spill a drop of hot oil. When the bread had puffed up and turned golden, it was patted with a towel and filled with barbecued, shredded beef and lettuce. The taste was divine. Years later, I was given the recipe for making the special "Navajo Fry Bread".

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ cup nonfat dry milk
- 1-1/3 cups lukewarm water
- Shortening (or lard) for frying

Directions for making the dough: Combine the flour, salt, baking powder, and dry milk in a bowl. Mix the dry ingredients together and add enough warm water to make a soft dough. Knead it thoroughly, cover it with a dishtowel, and allow it to stand in a draft-free, warm area for an hour. Pinch off an egg-size piece of dough and work it from one palm to another to flatten a "disk" of dough. Finally, use a rolling pin to spread it out to 9 inches in diameter.

To cook the dough, follow the instructions above. I hope you try this legendary treat.

Best Wishes,
Chuckwagon