

# The Batter Ring Baker

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The feeling starts about four days into every canoe trip. Sure, the days have been full of adventure. And it's great to be out paddling in the wilderness. But at supper time, dry crackers or moldy bagels just don't cut it any more. Fresh baked goods sound awfully tasty, whether as dessert or with the main meal. That old camping staple, bannock, can be turned out with just a fry-pan and campfire coals. Top the pan with a lid full of coals, and fancier fare, like kuchen and gingerbread, can be added to the menu. But it ain't easy ... You'll have to watch the contents very carefully. We've certainly eaten our share of charred crusts and gooey centers.

Folding reflector ovens expand the baking repertoire even further, but they take more time, firewood and pack space than we can usually muster. **So, on our outings, we use a little home-made unit we call the "Batter-Ring Baker"** to produce fresh baked goods, even when time, space and firewood are in short supply. It'll bake muffins, cornbread, bannock, kuchen or cake to golden perfection, in about 15 minutes. Gingerbread, brownies and yeast breads take 20 to 25 minutes, but are well worth the extra wait. The Batter-Ring is light, simple, and is made of three widely available components: a ring-shaped pan to contain the batter, a top or lid, and a diffuser plate. After greasing the inside of the pan and charging it with batter, the three components are stacked atop a backpacking stove, simmering at low heat. .. generally, as low as possible. We've tried the baker with many different camp stoves and it worked well enough on all of them. But the Batter-Ring bakes best with stoves that offer good low-end heat control, such as Coleman's Peak 1 or one of the butane-fired units. The Batter-Ring also bakes nicely over a bed of campfire coals.

The idea is to distribute the stove's heat as evenly as possible around the ring-shaped pan of batter. It happens like this:

A - The bottom of the batter is heated by hot gasses between the diffuser plate and the pan.

B - The outer edge of the batter is heated by flame escaping at the outer edge of the diffuser the pan.

C- Here's the real key: Heat rises up the center tube ( the "stack"), and is distributed into the pan interior. It bakes the inner edge and browns the top of the batter, then passes out of the pan and is deflected downward, heating the upper part of the pan wall.

With experience, it's not difficult to turn out golden-brown baked goods. And while you're learning, most of your failures should still be reasonably edible.

## MAKING YOUR OWN BATTER- RING BAKER:

1. **THE PAN** - You'll need a heavy- gauge, aluminum ring mold, the kind used for molding gelatin desserts. A mold with a relatively heavy wall thickness will be less likely to burn the batter. Some currently manufactured molds are too thin (read: cheap - think: melt). If you can't find a brand new heavy-gauge mold, poke around grandma's basement or watch garage sales.
2. **THE TOP** - A light-weight steel lid which fits over the ring mold. It should be about an inch larger in diameter than the open top of the pan and should extend down around it about three-quarters of an inch. Sort through the lids of various cookie tins until you find one that's about right. If the lid you select is painted, the paint can be burned away with a propane torch and the lid polished to bare metal with abrasive and steel wool.
3. **THE DIFFUSER** - A *stainless steel* pan lid serves as a diffuser plate to dissipate the direct-flame heat of the stove. Ours is about seven inches in diameter. The curved bottom of the mold should nest in the inverted pan lid with about a half-inch clearance between the two. Cut a hole in the diffuser, somewhat smaller than the inside diameter of the ring mold's center column. We used a cold chisel and anvil to do the cutting (don't forget to wear eye protection). The hole directs the heat from the stove burner up the "stack" of the ring mold.

. Now turn to the pan. Drill a series of holes just under the lip of the outer wall of the mold, as close to the top as possible. The holes should be about 3/8" diameter and should be evenly spaced about 1 1/2" apart all around the outer wall. When drilling, support the pan wall with a piece of scrap wood. Then drill a corresponding series of 5/16" holes around the top of the inner ring. They should be about 1/2" apart, to approximately balance the total area of inner and outer holes. Remove drill burrs with

abrasive and steel wool. Check to see that the lid lies flat across the top of the pan and that the lid flange will direct the heat down as it comes out the holes in the outer ring. That's all there is to it! You're ready to bake! Practice with your Batter-Ring Baker at home, perhaps starting with cornbread, a hearty addition to campsite fare. Various dry mixes are available in almost any food store. Mix according to directions and fill the greased mold about half full. If you use too much batter, it will plug the holes as it rises. When that happens, heat is trapped in the center column and the batter burns. During your practice-baking sessions, determine how much your Batter-Ring Baker will hold without plugging; then how much dry mix is required to make that amount of batter. Remember, you'll be using dry milk and powdered eggs on a canoe trip.

For example, the ring mold we use originally held four cups of liquid. Now, with the holes, and allowing for the batter to expand, we find two cups of batter is about right. The widely available "Jiffy" muffin mixes (7-8 oz. size) are the right size for our Batter-Ring Baker and will handle the appetite of two hungry paddlers. Re-package the muffin mix into a pint Ziplock bag, adding about 3 tablespoons dry milk and 2 tablespoons powdered egg. Toss in a few extra nuts, raisins, or dates if you like. The finished mix totals about two cups. Label the bag with an indelible marker and seal. To prepare on the campsite, just add about 1/2 cup water or enough to moisten.

We also enjoy Hodgson Mill Whole Wheat Gingerbread Mix ( a 15 oz. box makes two, 2-cup batter mixes). Bisquick works well for various kuchen or cobblers. There's lots of room for creativity here. Try a half-package of dry mincemeat in the gingerbread. Dried fruit can be reconstituted to make a cobbler, or fresh fruits like blueberries or raspberries can be added to kuchen. The tantalizing aroma of fresh brownies is a universal invitation to dessert. But be sure to use a mix that requires only water. If you really prefer to "do-it-yourself", you can make your own dry mixes from scratch. Here's a whole-grain, baking-mix recipe we have used for many years:

#### WHOLE-GRAIN BAKING MIX (WG Mix)

3 cups whole wheat flour

3 cups unbleached white flour  
1 cup wheat germ

4 cups rolled oats (coarse oatmeal)  
2 cups dried milk

4 Tbsp. baking powder  
1 Tbsp. salt

1 1/2 lbs. margarine

Combine dry ingredients and cut in margarine until like fine meal. Spread on trays and dry in the oven for 2 hours at 150 degrees. Cool and package for the freezer. Use this mix for the following:

**BANNOCK** - Add nuts and raisins or dill seed and currants to 1 cup WG mix. Bake 15 minutes.

**CORNBREAD** - 1 cup WG mix, 1/2 cup corn meal, 1 Tbsp. powdered egg, and about 1/3 cup water. Bake 15-20 minutes.

**FRUIT CRISP** - 1 cup dried fruit, 1/2 cup sugar, 1 1/2 cups water, 2 Tbsp. margarine. Combine and cook 30 minutes. Pour the following batter over hot fruit sauce: 1 cup WG mix, 1/3 cup water. Bake 20-30 minutes.

Yeast breads can also be baked in the Batter-Ring Baker if you have a bit of extra time in camp. Your favorite bread mixture will probably do fine. We use a Robin Hood Pizza Crust mix. Just allow the dough to rise before baking. For something sweeter, stir in brown sugar or honey, add raisins, and you have a real treat. Finally, if the baking sounds great, but the building seems troublesome, we suggest saving this article to read on your next canoe trip. The best setting in which to ponder constructing your own Batter-Ring Baker is on the fifth day, at supper time, preferably with a side-dish of green-fringed bagels.