Historic Concord: Colonial Cooking

Cooking in Colonial America was done on a fireplace. Women were in charge of managing the fire and cooking for their families. It was hard work and all family members had to help with chores related to cooking, cleaning, sewing, farming and much more!

What did colonial people use a fireplace for?
- Heat: There was no other heat but blankets and clothing!
- Light: Fire provides much of your light since there are no electric lights.
- Cooking: Large, open fireplace to cook food.

Look at this image of a colonial hearth. Does it look like anything is missing that we use today in our kitchen?

Oven:
- How would they do their baking? You could use a bake kettle - put coals on top and surround it with heat to make a little oven. Can you see it in the picture above nestled on the right side?
Stove:
  o Iron crane: Look for the metal arm that swings back and forth over the fire that controls the heat. Hang a pot on a long hook so it is close to the fire for high heat, swing the crane away from the fire or hang a pot on a short hook to create low heat. Just like you turn the knob on your stove!

Burners:
  o They had to make them!
  o Put hot coals in a small pile and put a trivet over them. Then the pot could sit on one of these to warm something or cook it.

Refrigerator:
  o There weren’t any!
  o Food could be preserved by making pickles, salting food, drying it, or putting it neatly packaged in a cool cellar.

Dishwasher:
  o Look at your hands – those are the dishwasher!

To Learn More
Come to the Concord Museum when we re-open to a hearth program! Visit https://concordmuseum.org/calendar/

Watch a video from our colleagues at Historic Deerfield of someone cooking on the colonial hearth!

https://www.historic-deerfield.org/demonstrations

Cooking at Home!
Want to try it yourself? Ask a grown-up or parent if you can make a few of these colonial recipes!
Colonial Recipes

Some of these use colonial measurements. These were not standard so you may have to think carefully to get the right measurements!

Homemade Applesauce

3 lbs. McIntosh apples
cinnamon
cider (or water)

In a pot pour a little cider (or water or juice) – just enough to cover the bottom and keep the apples from sticking. Peel and chop the apples into small chunks. Add chopped apples to the pot. Add several dashes of cinnamon (about 1 tsp or to taste). Cook on medium/low heat until apples are very soft and falling apart, stirring often. For a pink colored applesauce, include a few peels of apple skin while you cook!

Colonial Gingerbread

1 pint flour (2 cups)
1c. molasses
1¼c. cider (water or juice is OK too)
1sp. baking soda
Powdered ginger

Scoop of shortening the size of an egg
Grease a pie plate.
Mix shortening, the size of an egg, into a pint of flour.
One spoonful of ginger, one cup of molasses, one and one quarter cup cider and a great spoonful of dissolved pearl-ash (modern equivalent = baking soda), put together and poured into the flour while it is foaming, to be put into the oven in a minute.

Bake about 20 minutes in bake kettle (or a 350 degree oven until a tooth pick comes out clean – about 35-40 minutes!)
**Baked Beans**

*Based on a recipe from the family papers of Abigail Adams – Quincy, Mass. 1793*

1 pound dried small white beans  
½ teaspoon baking soda  
*8 oz. rinsed salt pork (or pancetta, or unsmoked bacon)*  
½ cup unsulphured molasses (not blackstrap)  
¼ cup maple sugar (or ½ cup maple syrup or ¼ cup brown sugar)  
1 ½ teaspoon dry mustard  
¼ teaspoon black pepper  
One medium whole onion, peeled with a 1 inch x cut at the root end. Pierce with a toothpick and press 8 whole cloves into the holes.  
6 cups boiling water  
1. Rinse beans well in a colander under cold water. Pick over for small stones. Cover with cold water by 2 inches and let sit overnight. Drain.  
2. Place in a pot and cover with cold water by 3 inches. Stir in ½ teaspoon of baking soda. Boil for 20 minutes (OR put in a slow-cooker on HIGH for 1 ½ hours).  
3. Rinse well in a colander and return to washed slow-cooker or oven-proof casserole with lid.  
4. Chop pork and add to beans.  
5. Mix in molasses and sugar (or syrup), mustard and pepper.  
6. Make a well in the middle of the beans and put clove-studded onion in. Cover with beans.  
7. Cover with boiling water. Do not stir.  
8. Cook in closed slow cooker on LOW for 12 hours or covered in a pre-heated oven at 250 for 10 hours. Done when bubbling and soft. Add a little boiling water if too dry at any point.  
*optional – add 2 tablespoons of butter or bland oil for vegetarian or vegan. Add a large fresh bay leaf.*