

FLATBREADS | TRANSCRIPT | LESSON 1

All About Flatbreads



GLUTEN-FREE
BAKING
ACADEMY

Welcome to Module 2, where we start gluten-free baking with unleavened breads, so in this lesson, we'll learn the basics of flatbread. And as the name implies, flatbreads are "flat," sometimes unleavened breads that are easy to prepare and super delicious. Some unleavened examples you're no doubt familiar with include tortillas and crackers. Some flatbread recipes like pizza dough usually call for leavening, but since we're working our way up the ladder of difficulty in this course, we'll save the leavened breads for after we build a bit more gluten-free baking confidence.

This module gets you acquainted with a few basic flatbread recipes, some new ingredients, and loads of technique. And it's important to know that beginning with this module, and in every module to follow, you'll have a few practice recipes to try and then extra recipes that you can practice if you want more. The practice recipes are chosen for their versatility, ingredient adaptability, and ease to create—these breads will likely become staples in your menu rotation.

The First Breads: A Little History Lesson

Before the cultivation of yeast for leavened loaves of bread, there were flatbreads. Just a simple mix of grains ground into flour, then mixed with water, and then grilled on a hot stone, over hot coals, or even ashes (which is likely how leavened pot ash bread was discovered, but more on that later). Folks have been making flatbreads for over 6,000 years and in some traditions, they were even punched with holes and strung up to store through cold-weather months, or when food was scarce. When breads are consumed with water, it expands and filled up a belly more.

Flatbreads were (and are) incredibly versatile, and they're a staple in many different cuisines around the world. They can be seasoned with aromatic vegetables, herbs and spices, or stuffed with veggies and meats, and many were designed to hold other foods or replace eating utensils altogether.



You may be familiar with “Chinese pancake” (think moo shu pancake) which is thin and chewy, maybe mixed with scallion.

Similar to the Chinese pancake is East African or Indian chapati flatbread. Other Indian flatbreads include deep-fried puri (aka poori); paratha which is a layered or laminated chapati, oftentimes veggie-stuffed; naan (which is leavened flatbread); and roti, which in addition to being a specific type of flatbread, this name can also be used to describe most unleavened Indian breads like chapati and paratha.

The Scottish have their oatcakes, which are similar to a biscuit or cracker—dry, flat and crispy like Israeli matzah/matzoh, or Scandinavian flatbrød or knekkebrød.

Native Americans developed a cornmeal cake known today in certain regions as “Johnnycake,” “cornpone,” “hoecake,” “jonikin,” and “journey cake,” this last name possibly being the origin of “Johnnycake” due to the fact that these breads could be carried on long journeys.

A similarly textured flatbread is the Jamaican bammy, which is made with cassava flour, or the French socca, or the Italian farinata both of which are made with chickpea flour.

This is just a sampling of traditional flatbread recipes from all over the world, and again, the unleavened ones. Leavening opens up even more possibilities for flatbreads, like pizza doughs and biologically leavened wonders like Ethiopian Injera. It’s all so exciting, but one step at a time...

Tips for Making Gluten-Free Flatbreads

Here are some important new techniques to keep in mind for unleavened flatbread making this week.

1. When rolling out or using a press for tortilla dough, sandwich the dough between two sheets of unbleached parchment paper. This minimizes mess and stickiness, and helps you create even flatbread dough without a lot of fuss. Sometimes, you want the parchment to be able to move and twist, say if you



are hand shaping tortillas. Other times when hand rolling, you may want the parchment to stay put. And in this case, a silicone baking mat under the bottom piece of parchment will hold the parchment in place. So will a slightly damp kitchen towel or a grippy drawer liner if you don't have a silicone baking mat. When using a tortilla press or hand rolling or shaping, using parchment makes everything from clean up to transferring of the tortilla to the pan to cook super easy. Save the sheets of parchment after use—they're super reusable. Just give them a wipe down and make sure they are dry (moisture attracts mold), fold up and store for next time.

2. When making tortillas the dough can be sticky, especially if it has a touch too much water. If it doesn't want to peel off the parchment paper, transfer the bottom sheet of parchment WITH the rolled-out tortilla into the heated, dry pan tortilla-side down. We use this step whether tortillas are sticky or not because it's easy. Allow it to dry for a few seconds and then you should easily be able to pull back the parchment on top. Remember, wax paper is NOT parchment paper. Don't use wax paper in a hot pan—you'll have quite a mess. Also important to note, unbleached parchment paper tends to be more user-friendly and peelable. Bleached parchment works, but it may be a bit more fussy as its surface isn't as slippery as unbleached parchment paper.

3. When using psyllium husk in a recipe for flatbreads, or any kind of bread, ALWAYS whisk together the dry ingredients until the psyllium is thoroughly incorporated. Then, add the wet ingredients. When water comes into contact with psyllium, it clumps up and expands and works its gluten-free binding magic. You want it uniformly incorporated into the dry ingredients before adding liquid to the dough.

So, there you have it—the basics of flatbreads, plus a little history. Take that lesson recap to fine-tune your mastery and then grab your apron and dive into the Practice Recipes. Let's get baking!

