

## OATS

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**HARVESTING OAT GRAIN:** Mature oats are 2-5 feet high depending on the variety and soil fertility. Oats are harvested when half the leaves are green and the grain has just finished the milk stage and gone into the dough stage. A well-filled oat head has 30-150 grains per stalk. Cut and let cure 1—2 days. Then sheave, and set up the sheaves in long, narrow shocks running north and south to cure. Oats need more drying than barley or wheat. If rain's a threat, move them to a shed, or mow and dry there as long as it takes—2 days to 2 weeks.

[note: This is the old time farm method. Now we wait until the leaves and stalks are yellow and dry and harvest with a combine. You can wait until the oats are ripe and dry but if you wait too long birds may get them, the ripe oats may fall to the ground, bad weather may knock them down, or they may fall out while cutting or handling.]

Then your oats will be cured. Haul the sheaves carefully to your threshing area and thresh. [by treading with feet, beating with a flail or stick, or beating inside a large container]. A yield of 30-40 bushels per acre is fine, although a 90-100-bushel yield has been reported on good ground. Now you've got a bunch of fine horse feed—or people food, once it's hulled, unless you grew *A. nuda*. [hulless oats] You'll have oat straw left over from the threshing, about 2 lb. per pound of grain harvested.

[note: To keep oats the moisture must be below 12% or they will mold or spoil.]

[note: You don't have to hull hulless oats]

**HULLING:** To prepare oats for human food, you must thoroughly remove the hull. Oats in the hull are about 30 percent hull, and that hull is all pure indigestible fiber. The grain inside is higher in protein than any other, but how do you get at it?

**Roasting:** Hulling is easier if you first heat the oats. Commercial processors toast the grain for an hour and a half. That loosens the hulls as well as reduces the moisture content. To accomplish this at home, follow the directions for parching under "Wild Rice." [Dry in food dehydrator or oven

no more than 100 degrees F, or lay out in the sun a few days making sure to protect it from wind, rain, birds, dirt etc.]

**Milling:** Then you mill. It works well to now grind oats between two millstones that are set very precisely apart so that the space between them is narrow enough for the millstones to scrape off the oat hulls without crumbling the precious groats inside. This is called a burr mill. Set the grinder to 1/16-inch clearance between grinding burrs. Or you can hull the oats in a roller mill; Sears sells a family-sized one (better check on that). Then winnow out the hulls in the wind or before a fan.

**Blender "Milling:"** Or you can do a barely satisfactory job in a heavy-duty blender. The blender actually cuts up the oats, but in the process it chops the hulls too, and some of them will fall off. So you put the oats into the blender, run it a moment, and then sift, and the little stuff is oat flour. The blender system is inefficient and wasteful but better than nothing. Some people grind the oats in the blender and cook them, hulls and all. It's good for their cholesterol count!

**COOKING WITH OATS:** We now know that eating oats can reduce cholesterol and lower blood pressure. Good stuff. You can buy hulled oat groats from health food stores or mail-order outlets specializing in whole grains (see the list in Chapter 1). Or you can buy the ones sold for animal feed; Whole groats can be used in soups the same as barley or can be made into porridge. Or you can grind oat groats in a regular grinder—the same kind you'd use for wheat. Oats, like barley don't leaven, so you can't make a good bread out of oat flour alone, unless it's a very thin tortilla-like bread—an oatcake. But you can add oat flour to any other bread (or cookie!) recipe. Many oat recipes originated in Scotland, where oats have long been the staff of life in the form of oatcakes and porridge.

**OAT PORRIDGE:** If you are making porridge out of home-ground groats, you first grind and then cook. The coarser you grind, the longer it will need to cook. Don Winters, Nova Scotia, Canada, wrote me, "I grind 2/3 c. of oat groats (hulled oat berries), giving 1 c. of cracked oats and flour. Bring 2 c. water to boil. Add the oats and flour. Simmer for 20 minutes until water is taken up by oats, I add 2 teas. cinnamon and 1/2 c. raisins after 10 minutes or so. This will serve 2 or 3 people. I like it with real maple syrup over it" I usually serve it with milk or cream and a sweetening. But for a special touch, add some

brown sugar, raisins, or cream just before serving. It's also nice if you stir in fruit peaches or apricots or...

**GROAT CEREAL:** Put oat groats, soft, and water in a casserole. Use 2 parts water to 1 part groats. Plan on cooking it a long, long time. (Put it on the night before you want it for breakfast) .

**ROLLED OAT CEREAL:** Use 1 part rolled oats to 2 1/2 parts water. Pour the oats into the boiling water. Reduce heat to medium. Wait about 10 minutes for the oats to cook. Remove the pan from the heat, cover, wait 5 more minutes, and serve. Cook in a double boiler with a tight lid. Good with raisins or chopped apples added shortly before you take it off the heat

**Oat Flour:** Put groats or rolled oats through a grain mill or twice through a regular food grinder.

**OATCAKES:** This was often made in old Scotland. Mix your oat flour with enough water to make a dough. Knead as you would bread. Then roll out as thin as you can. Cut into squares. Fry on an iron plate or griddle or in a pan that is shiny with oil. Serve warm with butter and honey or.. Ruth, who lives in Bonaire (Netherlands Antilles), wrote me, "We make oatcakes by shaping batter into rounds about 1 cm (1/3 inch) thick and then cutting into pie-shaped wedges before baking in a very slow oven. Good cold with honey too."

**OAT FLOUR APRICOT FRITTERS:** Sift together 1/2 c. oat flour, 1/2 c. rice flour (health food stores carry it), and 1 t. baking powder. Add 1 t. honey, a pinch salt, 1 egg 1/4 c. milk and 1 c. stewed apricots. Drop mixture by tablespoonfuls into hot deep fat. Fry until a golden brown. Drain. You can roll in powdered sugar for a fancy touch. Doesn't make but a dozen.

**GRANOLAS:** When I was a little girl, I liked a bowl of raw rolled oats with milk and honey for breakfast in the summertime. Then somebody came along and invented granola, which is even better. You'll have to visit your health food store (or grocery store) for some of these ingredients. It's pretty hard to grow almonds, coconuts, and carob in your yard unless you live in southern California. Granola recipes are fun to make, so good to eat, and so healthy! Store any granola in an airtight container. It will keep several weeks.

It's best stored in the freezer or in plastic bags or jars in the refrigerator.

**BASIC UNCOOKED GRANOLA:** Here are proportions for any amount. Make your recipe one-half cereal, and have at least half of that half be rolled oats and the rest be some kind of other rolled cereal like wheat flakes or rye flakes. Then add one-fourth dried fruit or some kind of fruit (even fresh, if you're going to eat the granola right away), one-fourth nuts or seeds and sweetening; and extras like maybe powdered milk or wheat germ. I can guarantee you it will be good to eat. You can eat this make-your-own granola anytime after you've given it a good shaking to mix all ingredients together. Shaking it in a big grocery bag works well. It helps if you use brown sugar rather than molasses or honey for the sweetening; that way you don't have anything wet and sticky in there! You can make a cold breakfast cereal by pouring cold milk over granola and eating as is. You can make a hot cereal for a winter's morning by cooking granola a short time in a little water.