

## HOW TO MAKE A MĀORI HĀNGĪ



### Spread the love

A hāngi is a traditional Māori style of cooking which is still commonly practiced throughout New Zealand today. It is a process where steam is used as a medium of cooking the food while it is beneath the ground. Interestingly, this style of cooking can be found all around the Pacific with slight variations, including Chile where it is called Curanto and consists mainly of seafood as well as the Umu Pae on Easter Island. The Hāngi It is cooked on special occasions, and the whole process takes several hours.

Cooking this traditional dish involves digging a well in the ground, heating volcanic rocks in it with the help of a good fire, putting food baskets on the stones, and covering everything with soil for several hours before opening or lifting the hāngi. It is a steaming method but on the ground.

In the beginning, food was protected with leaves, hand-carved bowls, and sticks, but today aluminum foil is used.

For a good tasting, the best place is Rotorua, where eating becomes a cultural experience. Many variants and details can be changed.

Nau mai haere mai (Welcome)

### A TRADITIONAL MĀORI MEAL



#### Step One - Preparation

The key to a successful hāngi, is to have good rocks, and good wood. In order for your rocks to absorb a sufficient amount of heat, they need to be volcanic. Non-volcanic stones will crack and explode which can be dangerous, and ultimately undermine the success of your hāngi. When gathering wood, it is important to take into consideration what types of wood will burn over a long period of time and gather lots of heat. Generally, these are hard woods, but to save our native forests Macrocarpa is excellent as it is easy to find, creates lots of heat, and a good pile burns easily for 3-5 hours, a perfect amount of time to for your hāngi stones to turn white hot.

A common misconception is that you need a deep hole or pit for your hāngi. This is not necessary as it can become reasonably difficult to place and receive food from the hāngi. Depending on the size of your hāngi, a good hole should be deep enough to fit the hot stones in, as wide as the bottom baskets and then slightly flair out to the sides, similar to a wok. This means later when placing the mutton cloth and sack on top of the food, these will not get burnt by uncovered hot stones, this is important because burnt sacks can substantially hinder the flavor of your hāngi.

Before you begin, you should have good nonflammable sacks, mutton cloths and a sheet , that no one has slept on, soaking in a tub, or barrel of water. The water within the wet sacks combined with hot stones will later create the steam necessary to cook the food, therefore this is



extremely important not to forget.

You must also be prepared to shelter the hāngi, remember, wind kills a hāngi, not rain. This is due to wind getting in beneath the dirt and cooling the stones. Therefore, a tarpaulin, and corrugated iron together are very good to protect your hāngi. If the day is nice this may not be necessary, but it is better to have these on site, as proper preparation prevents poor performance.

## Step Two - The Fire

There are two different locations when deciding where to burn your fire. One is over the hole, so as the fire gets smaller the hot stones fall into it. This requires the ash to be thoroughly removed to prevent a smoky-tasting hāngi, depending on the depth of the hole this can be difficult.

The method I was taught was to build the fire besides the hāngi pit, and relocate the hot stones into a clean hole. You will need to have no skin vulnerable when performing this, as this process is very hot. It also pays to have extra workers on hand to rotate when the fire gets to hot.

The relocation of the stones needs to be preformed swiftly to make sure the stones maintain as much heat as possible.

There is no particular way to stack the fire, as long as there is room to light the fire underneath the wood, and the volcanic stones are placed throughout the pile, in places more likely to gather heat, this is not extremely important as the stones can always be replaced back on the fire when the fire is alight. If you stack the wood, the day before the hāngi, then it is important to cover the wood in case it rains.



The fire needs to be lit approximately 3-5 hours before you wish to start cooking. This allows enough time for the stones to gather heat. While the fire is ablaze, it is important to have people mind the area, placing stones back into the fire if they fall out, and generally keeping an eye out to prevent any

hazardous situations.

### **Step Three - Food Preparation**

It is possible to hāngi most types of foods. Generally, we cook chicken and stuffing, beef, pork, potatoes, pumpkins, kumara (sweet potatoes) carrots, and steamed pudding, but whatever is available will probably be good.

While the fire is burning, you normally have enough time to prepare the food. First you must peel and cut the vegetables, (this must be small enough to be cooked but not too small or it will go mushy), then place vegetables into a mutton cloth and soak in a pot. When dealing with the meat it is good to seasons as you see fit.



Garlic rosemary sage are particularly nice, but use your imagination and flare to experiment and find what you like. Meat traditionally was wrapped with leaves of eatable plants, today we use cabbage or banana leaves, but generally tinfoil.

Once all the food is prepared line the hāngi baskets, with either cabbage or banana leaves or tinfoil and wait until the fire is ready.

#### **Step Four - Covering of the Hāngi**

When the stones are visibly white and admitting a considerable amount of heat it is time to cook the food. First you must clear any wood that is still burning into a spot out of harm's way. Now with long shovels begin to transport the hot rocks from the fire into the hāngi pit. This needs to be done as fast as possible and rotating workers efficiently so when others rest someone is available to take their place.

Once all the stones are placed side by side in the hole, with no room for the heat to escape, gently slap the hot rocks repetitively with the wet sacks creating steam. After doing this briefly, place the food baskets on top of the hot stones, normally meat, and poultry go on the bottom layer closer to the heated stones, then vegetables on the second layer. The food should always be on hand during this process so it is covered as soon as possible.

First you need to cover the food with a wet sheet of material which no one has slept on, this needs to be wide enough to cover all the food and touch the side of the hāngi pit avoiding any rocks. Then you begin placing the wet sacks over the food.

Remember when you are uncovering the hāngi if any dirt gets on top of the food the hāngi will be ruined, so it is best to strategically place each sack. The first sack you put on should be the last one you take off, this needs to go onto the very top of the food. Then you place the others overlapping the previous sack until all the food is covered. The last sacks placed on should be the ones at the base of the food and sides of the hole.



When covering the sacks with dirt, always start covering them from the edges, slowly making your way to the top, this is to insure no dirt will cave onto the stones or food. Once the hāngi has been covered, gently pat down on top of the dirt to make it smooth. If any steam is seeping through, place more dirt on top of the places releasing steam. This needs to be repeated throughout the next 2-3 hours when it occurs.

### **Step Five - Uncovering the Hāngi**

After approximately 3 hours have lapsed, it is time to uncover the hāngi. This is the easiest part of the entire process but you should take extreme care. Slowly scrap the dirt off as carefully as possible until you come across the sacks. Now begin to peel the sacks off, beginning from the outer layers making your way to the initial sack. It is very important to not let any dirt get on to the food.

The sacks should be hot, but will be removed with bare hands. Hopefully by this stage steam should be rising off the hāngi. After you remove the sheet of material, two people per basket should be on hand with gloves or towels ready to remove the food, and take it to a work station, to carve and prepare the food for service.



### **Note**

If you are going to undertake a large hāngi please seek advice from someone experienced for further help to insure your hāngi is successful. A handy tip is when cooking for hundreds of people, you should cook lots of small hāngi, rather than one giant one. Because if you make a

mistake on the big hāngi, all the food will be raw, but smaller hāngi are easier to cook, and if one is uncooked you can rely on the others.

He manako te koura i kore ai! (Gold is a blessing in disguise!)

Kia ora! Good luck!

### HĀNGI MAORI



**Ingredients (quantity depends on the number of people):**

Potatoes

Kumara (sweet potatoes)

Carrots

## Onions

Another type of vegetable to taste

Meat such as chicken, pork and mutton

### Preparations:

1. Prepare potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, and other vegetables beforehand.
2. Wash them, peel them and cut them.
3. Dig a hole about an approximate depth of half a meter , height of the knees, and two meters in diameter.
4. Fill the hole with wood slow burning and high energy content and pile volcanic stones or pieces of steel on top.
5. Light the fire and let it burn for two or three hours until the stones or steel are red hot.
6. At that time remove the embers and wood without burning.
7. Prepare the vegetables and meat in 2 independent baskets, made of wire or wire mesh.
8. The meat should be placed below the vegetables, as it will take longer to cook.
9. Cover the baskets with clean, white fabrics and you can use old sheets or tablecloths, but they



must be clean, that they are completely soaked.

10. Place-soaked sacks of burlap on the fabrics so that the food is not contaminated with earth and with the help of a shovel, carefully put soil on the sacks.

11. The steam should not be allowed to escape.

12. If it escapes at some point, it must be covered with earth.

13. Let cook for three or four hours.

14. When in doubt, leave it more time than less.

15. When it is time to open the hāngi, extreme care must be taken when removing the soil.

16. Parsley juice is the best option for the dessert menu.