

*The Complete NZ*  
***Hangi Guide***

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## Things You Need To Know First

### Ground

The ground you use will have a huge effect on the outcome of your Hangi. For best results prepare your Hangi in GOOD healthy soil which is suitable for growing plants or lawn. A slightly lumpy moist texture is desirable.

If your soil is too sandy, dry or grainy the heat will not be contained and your Hangi will not cook as well. Alternatively, if you use dense wet soil or clay, your Hangi will sweat as the moisture will not permeate through the soil and everything will turn out soggy.

It's best just to use a nice piece of lawn in your garden. The grass will grow back after a while so don't worry about that. A nice loose healthy soil is a bit easier to dig into too ☺

**BEWARE!** Do not pick a spot too close to any other trees and fixtures as the fire may spread and this could really turn bad (need I say more...). Make allocation for wind direction also. A strong wind can carry your flames for up to 3 metres.



This Hangi was placed too close to this tree and the result was burnt leaves.

## Basket

The size and shape of your Hangi basket is important. Although there is no standard size, you want to make sure that there is **NO space in the top of your basket when it is filled with food** as this pocket of air at the top of your basket will have a detrimental effect on how your food cooks.



A typical Hangi basket - Make sure your Hangi basket is filled with food, leave NO space at the top.

The type of basket you use can vary greatly; there are NO hard and fast rules here. There are many options such as wire, steel welded, clay pots, wire netting etc...



Some more examples of Hangi baskets

Maybe you have one already? If not, then there are a couple of things to think about; Firstly, don't make your Hangi basket too high. A flat design is best as a large surface area at the bottom is better because the heat radiates from the bottom. The next factor to consider is strength. Your basket needs to be strong enough to hold all of the food you put into it. This includes raw and cooked. For example if you used a woven flax basket this would likely hold all of your food as you lowered it into the ground. However, when it was cooked your flax basket may have disintegrated somewhat so removing it from the ground without spilling your food would be tricky.

**More on size** - I wouldn't advise making your baskets too big. This makes it harder to lift and more difficult to make smaller Hangis when you have less numbers. A good size is about 1000mm (L) x 500mm (W) x 400mm (D). If you want to cook a big Hangi, consider making more baskets rather than making one large basket.

If you're in New Zealand Hangi baskets can be bought on Trade Me [www.trademe.co.nz](http://www.trademe.co.nz). There are some good deals and plenty of selection.

## Hangi Stones

For the best results use **igneous (volcanic) stones** about the size of a large grapefruit or slightly larger. These volcanic stones heat to high temperature and slowly release the heat for many hours. This ensures your Hangi will be cooked!

**BEWARE!** Don't use sedimentary stones (e.g. sand stone and mud stone) or metamorphic rocks (e.g. slate and schist) as they can chip and shatter when heated which can be very dangerous if you're standing nearby. They also won't hold heat nearly as well as volcanic stones (igneous stones).

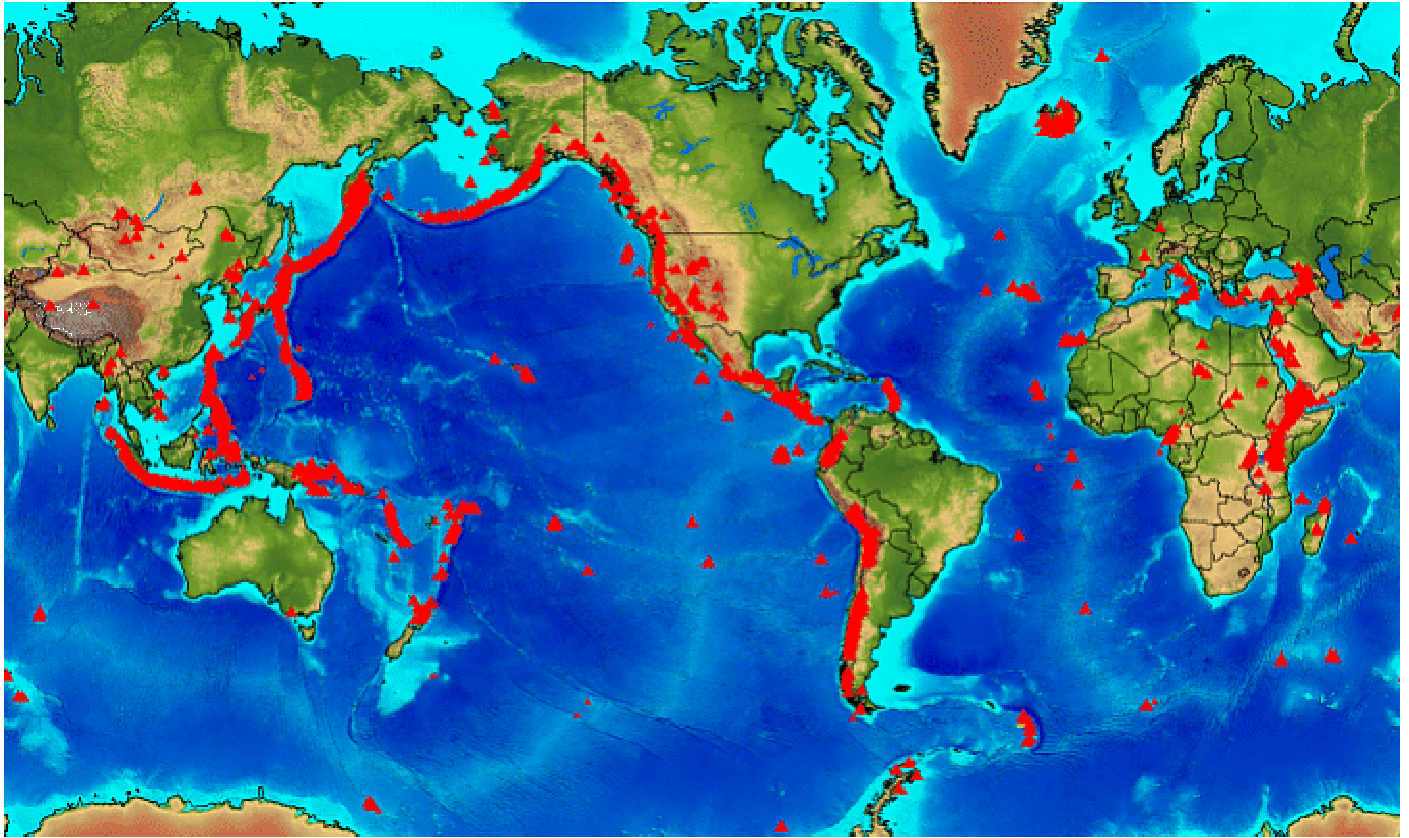
Igneous tend to be dark and shiny. The edges are generally sharper and they do not feel "grainy" or "sandy" to the touch.

### 3 of the Most Common Types of Hangi Stones Found in New Zealand

	<p><b>Rhyolite</b>  <b>Colour</b> - variable, but light coloured.  <b>New Zealand occurrences</b> - Northland, Great Barrier Island, Coromandel Peninsula, Bay of Plenty, Rotorua-Taupo area (Taupo Volcanic Zone), minor occurrences on Banks Peninsula and the Canterbury Plains.</p>
	<p><b>Andesite</b>  <b>Colour</b> - variable, but typically bluish-grey or grey (lighter coloured than basalt).  <b>New Zealand occurrences</b> - West Auckland (Waitakere Range), Coromandel Peninsula, Great and Little Barrier Islands, Western Bay of Plenty (Kaimai Range), Raglan-Kawhia area (Karioi, Pirongia), Taranaki, Central North Island (Ruapehu, Tongariro, Ngauruhoe).</p>
	<p><b>Basalt</b>  <b>Colour</b> – Dark grey to black.                      The most widespread of all igneous rocks, and comprises more than 90% of all volcanic rocks.  <b>New Zealand occurrences</b> - Northland, Auckland, Banks Peninsula, Timaru, Dunedin, Chatham Islands, Campbell Island, Auckland Island.</p>

## World Volcanic Zones

If you're overseas the red volcanic areas are where you are most likely to find some good Hangi stones. If you're not in range, don't worry, there are some alternatives (see below)



You'll need enough stones to loosely cover the bottom of your basket. These stones can usually be found around rocky mountain ranges. Finding them is not as hard as you think, just take a drive out to your nearest rocky outcrop, valley, river or mountain range and be sure to park your car as close as you can to where the stony areas are.

The most common way to choose the right stones is to take a hammer, or similar object, with you and strike each stones as you go. The ones that produce a high pitched ringing noise, rather than a THUD are the ones you want.

Make sure you thoroughly dry out the stones before you intend to use them.

### Hangi Stones Can Be Also Be Found at;

Landscaping and Garden Supplies businesses	Ring around to ask
Trade Me - <a href="http://www.trademe.co.nz">www.trademe.co.nz</a>	Search 'Hangi'. There are heaps of people selling Hangi gear on Trade Me.
Stone walls	In the old days people used igneous stones to make walls.



### Hangi Stone Alternatives:

1. **Railway Irons** – Cast irons pieces, such as railway irons, are a reasonable substitute. Just make sure the irons are in small enough pieces to fit into your fire and your Pit. The irons will heat to a higher temperature than Hangi stones, however the irons will lose heat faster than the stones.
2. **Fire Bricks** – These are the kind of bricks used to make pizza ovens and are designed specifically to heat to a high temperature and hold their heat without cracking. They are similar to irons in the fact that they lose heat faster than the stones. However they don't heat to as high a temperature as irons do, making them a less desirable choice.
3. If you really can't find any volcanic stones, irons or fire bricks then sedimentary stones taken from the middle of a stream or river are your best bet. The natural water flows would have somewhat 'hardened' these stones, making them a better bet.





## Wood

You need a lot of wood! Make sure you have enough wood to sustain a flaming hot fire for **at least 2 hours**, preferably longer. A mixture of dry timber and slow burning logs is best for a Hangi. Hardwood timber is best for the fire because it gives out more heat. A good choice is lighter timber underneath and hardwood on top.

Be sure to use clean pieces of wood free of any paint, oil or stains. Use **ONLY untreated timber** such as regular firewood, logs and trees.

**Beware - NEVER use treated timber!**

Any impurities in the wood you use WILL taint your Hangi taste. In some cases you can even poison yourself if the wood is highly treated.

For a uniquely special smokey taste try to find some Manuka or Tea Tree timber; the taste is just that little bit better and well worth the effort if you can find it.



Manuka Forest (left) and stacking your wood (right)

## Sacks, Cloths and Tools

Here is a list of the basic things you'll need;

- Sacks
- Muslin cloth (also known as hessian or mutton cloth)
- 2 or 3 spades or shovels
- Various buckets and vessels

**Sack Cloths** – If you can get your hands on some sack cloth, this really is your best option. **Be sure NOT to use plastic sacks (they'll melt)**. Sugar sacks or vegetable sacks are best. Make sure you use cloth sacks as they hold water very well. Try asking some local farmers or vegetable growers. Farming supply stores are also a good source, but may be costly. If you can't get sacks, don't worry. There are some other options too.

Alternative options include; thick tablecloths, woollen blankets or any other natural fibres which won't burn or melt in the heat.

The more you can get the better. Ideally you'd want to have 1-2 large sheets of sack cloth large enough to completely cover your Hangi with a little bit extra around the sides. Plus 4-5 small pieces for covering your Hangi basket 4m<sup>2</sup> (2m x 2m).



Large sack cloths are a really good option and they can be re-used again and again



Soak your cloths overnight the night before your Hangi

**Muslin Cloth** – Also known as hessian or mutton cloth. This is available at most supermarkets in NZ. If you're overseas it's best to ask around for your nearest retailer. This flexible thin material is essential if you are cooking stuffing, however vegetables don't have to be cooked in muslin. Some people put their vegetables in straight on top of their meat. The advantage of using muslin is that it's a bit tidier as your veges can be removed more easily once the Hangi is cooked.



Muslin cloth for holding your veges and stuffing

**Spades and Shovels** – The most obvious tools, needed for digging the Pit. Even if you're planning to dig the Pit yourself, it's a good idea to have a few extra spades lying around as I've found that guys standing around just can't help themselves and will end up mucking in with you.



Many hands make light work – have 2-3 spades handy so your mates can help you out



If you don't have sacks, table cloths are a good alternative, however, **don't expect to use them again!**

**Buckets & Containers** – As you can see from the pictures, you'll need some reasonable sized buckets to soak your cloths overnight. The more cloths you have the more buckets you'll need. It's also optional to soak your vegetables overnight in water to help with the moisture content and cooking.

## Food

Now here's the good part! There is no better taste than a well cooked Hangi. The staple ingredients are raw meat and vegetables and sometimes a steam pudding (see Appendix 1). There aren't any rules about what meat and vegetables you can use, however here is a list of what you'll find in most Hangis;

### Meat

- **Chickens** – wPit or pieces, whatever you have handy.
- **Beef** – any cut of meat will do, but I wouldn't waste your nice steaks or fillet.
- **Pork** – My favourite! Pork rolls are great, chops are good too.
- **Lamb** – Any cut. Mutton is good too.
- **Shellfish** – Mussels and crayfish can be done in the Hangi, just separate them from the other meat in foil.
- **Fish** – Theoretically you *could* cook fish, but personally I haven't seen it before so you'd have to test that one out for yourself.

The best advice I can give you here is **NOT to use expensive cuts of meat**. The great thing about a Hangi is that it turns cheap cuts of meat into very tasty pieces of meat.



A Hangi with pork rolled roasts and wPit chickens. Meat ALWAYS gets placed at the bottom of the basket.

### Vegetables

- **Potatoes** – peeled and halved (if big).
- **Kumara** – These are ESSENTIAL! They taste soooo good. I'd not even bother with spuds if you can get more kumara. Don't forget to peel them.
- **Pumpkin** – Remove seeds and cut into whatever size you like.
- **Cabbage** – Cabbage is an ESSENTIAL vegetable as the leaves are used to line the bottom of your Hangi basket. This prevents your Hangi from burning when being placed directly onto the hot stones. Use the outer thick rubbery leaves for this purpose. The inside bits can be quartered and squeezed into your Hangi basket where there is any spare room.
- **Green Vegetables** – don't put your green veges in the Hangi. Cabbage is OK, but that's it.



Cabbage leaves in the bottom of your basket will prevent your meat from burning

## Stuffing

Stuffing is one my favourite parts of the Hangi. It's basically the same as the stuffing you get in a chicken, except don't worry about all that flash stuff like lemon rind and fruit. Simple stuffing is best. Here's my Mum's recipe which always goes down a treat.

### *Mum's Stuffing Recipe*

- **1 loaf of bread** (we usually use white bread, but you could use whatever you have available)
- **2 Onions, diced**
- **200g Butter** (you can use more or less, it's up to you)
- **1/3 Cup Mixed Herbs**

1. Using your food processor rip the bread up and add gradually into the processor to make breadcrumbs.

Just in case you were thinking about it, I don't advise buying shop breadcrumbs because they are just too hard and too small.

2. Melt the butter in a saucepan.

3. Add the diced onion and cook until onion changes colour.

4. Combine the breadcrumbs, onion & butter mixture into a large bowl and add the mixed herbs. Mix thoroughly.

## Hangi – Step By Step

### Step 1 – Timing (The Day Before)

Before you do anything you need to decide *when* you want your Hangi to be ready. Are you preparing it for lunch or dinner? If you're doing it for lunch or late afternoon most of the preparation should ideally be done the day before. However, if you're doing a Hangi for dinner or late supper then you can easily get away with doing most of the work on the day.

You need to be aware that you should light your fire **at least 5 hours before you plan to eat**. That means if you're cooking a Hangi lunch you need to light your fire at around 7am.

### Step 2 – Dig Your Pit

I'd recommend doing this as early as possible. Find a suitable area to dig (See page 4). Remove the lawn cover carefully and put it aside (you'll be able to replace this later).

Be sure to dig your Pit to the exact dimensions of your basket, plus add about 15-20cm around the sides to allow for sacks and covering. Don't dig your Pit deeper than the height of the basket. It WILL stick up a little bit when the stones are underneath but this is ok.

When removing the soil, keep it aside in a tidy pile close to the Pit.

Be sure to pile it up on the opposite side of the Pit to where you are planning to have the fire. You want your soil to not get any heat from the fire. The more moisture that remains in your soil the better.



### Step 3 – Stack Your Fire

Stacking your fire is something that requires thinking and patience. Depending on the type and shape of the wood you have your stack will be shaped around that. As you can see below, for this fire we had mainly 4 x 2's. This made things easy as we could create a stack that had a lot of air circulation.

Position your stack close to where you dug your pit. This will make the transfer of hot stones easier once the fire has done its job.

You'll want to position your Hangi Stones so that they are in the centre of the fire where it will be the hottest. If you stack your fire carefully enough you should ideally not have to add any extra wood. The stack pictured below burned for around 2 hours solid. This is just the right amount of time for the Hangi Stones to get 'white hot'.



If it's likely to rain be sure to cover your stack and your Pit if you plan to leave it overnight. Excess water will have a detrimental effect on your final result at this stage.

### Step 4 – Prepare Your Food

You obviously should have already bought the food you want well before your Hangi is ready to put down. It's a good idea to peel and chop your vegetables the night before and have them soaking overnight to maximise the moisture content (they'll cook better and taste nicer).

Also prepare your meat by trimming the skin, fat and all the other bits you don't want to eat. This is up to you really. I personally like pork fat in my Hangi, but not so much chicken skin. The more work you do the night before the better. Stuffing and steam puddings can also be made the night before.

**Important!** – Make sure ALL food is defrosted COMPLETELY before going into the Hangi basket!



## Step 5 (On the day) – Light the Fire

Now that the day has arrived it's time to light your stack. The way I usually do it is with an oily rag stuffed into the middle of the fire at the bottom (use a stick to poke it into the middle). Light the rag and hopefully this should set it all off.

Now is the best part! It's now time to crack open a few beers with your mates and stand around and watch the fire. No seriously, you DO need to stand around and watch because if your stones fall off you need to be ready to shovel them back into the fire. Also, I wouldn't recommend leaving any fire unattended as anything could happen. Try to keep as much ash and debris out of the Pit as you can.

Some people do their fire IN the Pit. However I wouldn't recommend this as you'll end up having to shovel hot ash out of the Pit. Keep your fire close to the Pit but not IN the Pit.



Burn your fire for a good 2-3 hours until your Hangi stones are 'White Hot' as above



## Step 6 – Pack Your Basket

Whilst the fire is burning, now is the time to get your food packed into the basket.

Use the thick outside leaves of the cabbage to line the bottom of your Hangi basket (Left pic). Some people use tinfoil to line the bottom of the basket. This isn't traditional, however if you're using hot irons tin foil is a good idea as irons have been known to burn the meat.



Arrange your meat at the bottom of the basket (Middle pic). The meat is at the bottom because it requires the most heat. If you are really worried about your Hangi not cooking try to make your meat cuts as small as possible to ensure a thorough cook-through.

Arrange your bagged-up veges and steam pudding on top of the meat. The stuffing goes on the top with the remainder of the cabbages cut into quarters.



Once your basket is filled cover it up with a few of the smaller sacks that have been soaking overnight. As you can see from the pictures here, we didn't have enough spare sacks. Table cloths are ok to use too, just be aware that you probably won't be able to use them again!

One sack or two tablecloths should be used here.

## Step 7 – Transferring the Stones into the Pit

Once your fire has been burning for over 2.5 hours, or shorter if you are satisfied that the stones are as hot as they can be. It's time for the really HOT Hangi work.

If your fire has been burning for 3 hours or longer it's time to put it out. Don't use water on the stones! Try and use your spades to break the fire up and separate it from the stones. You can then use water to douse the fire.

Too much excess water on the stones at this stage will cause premature cooling.

This stage requires speed and efficiency. The longer the stones are exposed the faster they will cool. It's really important to get them into the Pit and covered AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!



Get as many guys around for this step as you possibly can. You'll want all spades on deck here.

If the area is hot to approach I'd recommend using wet towels around the head. Possibly having someone standing around to hose you down is a good option too.

Once you start removing the first stones from the fire and placing them into the Pit, **be sure to move quickly.** Try to keep as much of the ash and debris out of the Pit as possible. Distribute the stones evenly across one layer on the bottom of the Pit. This gives a relatively flat surface for the basket to be placed upon.

## Step 8 – Basket in the Pit

Before placing the basket on the stones sprinkle a light mist of water from the hose to remove any dust and create a little bit of steam. Having the right balance of water here is important. Too little water and the Hangi will be dry. Too much water and the Hangi will be wet and soggy.



Shake some water onto the stones to get the steam going

Remember to move quickly during this process as the longer the stones are exposed to air the cooler they are getting.

Now, place your basket on the stones in the centre of the Pit.

You can now begin covering your basket with the large sheets of wet sack cloth. It's important to cover the wPit basket, including the sides right down to the bottom of your Pit (see video).

2-3 layers of small sacking will generally be sufficient plus 1 or 2 large sacks to finish.

**Insurance policy!** Tip a small bucket of water onto the covered basket to provide that little bit of extra water content for the steaming process.

Start covering your Hangi with the dirt again. Start around the sides first and keep going until there is no steam escaping (see video). Keep piling on the dirt until there is no steam. If your pile runs out start digging from somewhere else and keep covering.

Pat it down lightly.

Grab some more beers guys! It's time to sit back and wait.....

Leave it for **2.5 – 3 hours** or longer if you have a big Hangi.

## Step 8 – Uncovering the Hangi

Remove the earth carefully using your spades.

Peel off your sacking materials carefully. You can use gloves here to make it easier as it is still very hot, however people may laugh at you so best just harden up.

You can either remove all of the coverings while the basket is still in the Pit, or, transfer the basket to the table and remove the coverings there. Up to you really? I'd recommend removing as many as you can while the Hangi is in-ground and leave the last few for on the table.

Be sure to use tea towels, oven mitts or rags for carrying the basket to the table. Don't try and be a big man here, it will be VERY hot!

That's It You're Done. You've Successfully Cooked a Traditional Maori Hangi. Well Done! Enjoy!

