

Traditional

Arrangement (c) Copyright 2025 by Donald J. Borchelt

33

Banjo tablature for 'Shortnin' Bread'. The piece is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The first measure has a D7 chord and a G note. The second measure has a 2.D7 chord and a G note. The tablature shows the following fret numbers: 14, 12, 0, 0, 14, 12, 0, 5, 2, 3, 0, 0. The notes 14 and 12 are highlighted in yellow. The piece ends with a double bar line.

This tune has its roots in the minstrel era, and when I first started playing banjo in my teens, it was in the repertoire of just about every fiddler I ran into. Each one played it a little bit different. You almost never hear it at a jam anymore. This arrangement isn't based on any particular version, it just reflects my memory of how I generally heard it played when I was young. The highlighted notes should be slightly emphasized to accentuate the syncopation.

Shortnin' bread was a simple fried bread made by plantation slaves, using just flour or corn meal and lard.

Put on the skillet, slip on the lid,
 Mama's gonna make a little shortnin' bread.
 That ain't all she's gonna do,
 Mama's gonna make a little coffee, too.

Mama's little baby loves shortnin', shortnin',
 Mama's little baby loves shortnin' bread,
 Mama's little baby loves shortnin', shortnin',
 Mama's little baby loves shortnin' bread.