



Here's a super recipe for the novice bread-baker

A certain mystique clings to the notion of bread-baking. It is mistakenly thought to be an extremely temperamental and time-consuming process.

In order to put this slanderous notion to rest, I would like to submit this recipe for Whole Wheat French Bread. It's the simplest and most versatile yeast bread you will ever encounter.

This is an ideal initiation for the novice bread-baker. It is almost impossible to go wrong with this recipe. A few considerations, however, should be kept in mind.

The first is that yeast is alive. It can even die of old age. The individual packets of yeast sold in grocery stores are stamped with an expiration date. Take this information literally. If it is past the expiration date, assume that the yeast has expired. It is dead, and no amount of careful handling on your part will revive it.

You must also beware of killing the yeast with too much heat. Some bread recipes even specify a temperature range for the liquid to be added. This seems impractical as well as intimidating.

ASSUMING THAT you are not going to take the temperature of the water, a good rule of thumb is that any liquid being added to yeast should be warm, never hot. If you feel unsure of how to gauge the temperature, just be sure to err in the direction of too cool rather than too hot.

Even if the liquid is only lukewarm, the worst consequence is a slow first rising.

For anyone who does a lot of yeast baking, it is less expensive to buy yeast in the bulk form available in health food stores rather than in individual packets. Just be careful not to confuse baking yeast with nutritional or brewer's yeast. They are not the same items.

The flours you will need for bread-baking are available in most grocery stores. If a re-

cipe calls for all-purpose flour, use unbleached rather than bleached flour for better body. With the addition of whole grain flours, loaves improve in flavor, texture and nutrition. Try to purchase the stone ground variety. Stone grinding results in a coarser flour with a longer shelf life. Since whole grain flours contain natural oils, they are susceptible to spoilage and should be kept refrigerated.

ANOTHER POINT to keep in mind is that the amount of flour needed to form a stiff dough will vary from one time to the next, even using the same recipe. Just keep stirring flour into the dough until it no longer is absorbed. Turn the dough out of the bowl and begin to knead it. You will know immediately when to add more flour. If the dough sticks to your hands in gocey globs, add more flour. If the dough forms a manageable ball, it contains enough flour.

Kneading is accomplished by partially rotating this ball and pushing down on it with the heels of your hands. Ten minutes of kneading are generally sufficient. Kneading, if done with sufficient vigor, is considered to provide a therapeutic release of tensions and aggressions.

Once the kneading is completed, the dough is set aside to rise in a warm, draft-free place. This direction, like that involving water temperature, can be intimidating. How warm? The answer here is the same as for liquid temperatures — better too cool than too warm. Don't for example, put the dough in a warm oven. It will kill the yeast.

ON THE OTHER HAND, you may wish to place the dough in the refrigerator. It can stay there, rising slowly, for several hours or even overnight. This can be a great convenience if you are interrupted in preparing bread, or if you would like to serve freshly baked bread early in the day.

One final caution — this bread will keep well for several days, but will then begin to dry out. At this point, it can be put to several good uses: made into fresh bread crumbs by spinning chunks of the dried bread in a blender (vastly superior to the packaged bread crumbs), cubed to make croutons for soups and salads, or spread with garlic butter and crusted with cheese to make the best garlic toast you will ever eat.

WHOLE WHEAT FRENCH BREAD

2 tbs. active dry yeast (or two envelopes yeast)

3 1/2 cups warm water

1 tbs. salt

2 1/2 cups whole wheat flour

5 1/2 cups unbleached flour

1 egg, slightly beaten (optional)

1. Sprinkle yeast into the warm water in a large mixing bowl. Stir until the yeast dissolves.

2. At low speed on an electric mixer, heat in the salt, whole wheat flour and two cups of the unbleached flour; beat until smooth. Gradually stir in about 3 more cups of the unbleached flour to make a soft dough.

3. Turn out onto a board which has been sprinkled with the remaining 1/2 cup unbleached flour. Knead until smooth and elastic, about 5 to 10 minutes, using only as much additional flour as is needed to keep the dough from sticking.

4. Place the dough in a large, greased bowl; cover with a clean, dry cloth. Let rise, in a warm, draft-free place, until doubled in bulk, about 4-5 minutes.

5. Punch the dough down, and knead 1 minute. Divide in half and roll each half into a rectangle, approximately 15x10 inches. Roll each up, jelly-roll fashion, starting at a long edge. Place each loaf diagonally on a large baking sheet which has been greased and sprinkled with cornmeal. (If you just grease the sheet where the bread will be placed, it will simplify cleanups.)

Let the dough rise again until doubled in bulk, about 30 minutes. You may wish to place one loaf in the refrigerator during the 30 minutes to slow down the action of the yeast. This will allow you to bake the two loaves consecutively. Cooking them at the same time interferes with air circulation in the oven and may cause burning.

6. Brush both loaves with the egg for a shiny glaze, if desired. Make diagonal cuts 1/4 inches deep in the loaves with a sharp knife.

7. Bake for 25 minutes in the center of a preheated 400 degree oven; quickly brush with cold water. Bake for an additional 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from the baking sheets and cool on wire racks. Makes 2 loaves.

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Good for health but no help to sex

It's a fallacy that oysters, raw eggs, lean meat and olives increase sexual potency. The fact is these foods, as well as all others, contribute to health and well-being.

But they don't have any special properties that increase sexual vigor. No one food possesses that ability.

Molasses tricks

Molasses helps make everyday cooking more flavorful and nutritious. Try these tricks.

MOLASSES MILK — Stir 1 tbs. light molasses into a glass of milk. Nice color and tangy flavor.

BARBECUE BASTE — To every half cup of bottled barbecue sauce, add 1 tbs. dark molasses, then use as desired.

NEW ORLEANS-STYLE SPAGHETTI SAUCE — To every cup of prepared spaghetti sauce, add 1 tbs. dark molasses.

TAFFY FROSTING — Stir 1 tbs. light molasses into canned vanilla frosting, and use on spice cake.

Pineapple Cake

Here is the recipe: One package pineapple upside-down cake mix, 1 cup dairy sour cream, 1 egg and 1/4 cup chopped nuts.

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease square pan, 8x8x1 inches. Beat cake mix, sour cream and egg in large bowl on low speed until moist. Beat on medium speed, scraping bowl frequently, 2 minutes. Pour batter into pan. Sprinkle topping mix evenly over batter. Drain pineapple, spoon over topping mix. Sprinkle nuts over pineapple. Bake 40 to 45 minutes, until wooden pick inserted in center of cake comes out clean. Serve warm. Refrigerate any remaining.



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Every Monday