Making Bread at Home

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Few food products are as exciting as bread. It carries the lore of centuries, the color of exotic lands, the challenge of feeding in the space age and the satisfaction of accomplishment. Bread is basic to the diet, and when made with enriched or whole grain flours furnishes important amounts of protein, iron, riboflavin, niacin and thiamine.

The creative satisfactions of making bread are many. There are few homemaking skills which give a greater sense of accomplishment or which produce more compliments.

Home baking may result in saving money, too. A recent U.S.D.A. report shows that most commercial baked products studied were more expensive than the home-prepared counterparts. You can make fluffy, light biscuits, a golden brown loaf, tender light muffins, and crisp crunchy corn breads if you understand the principles of bread making and master a few simple skills.

Ingredients

Flour—Wheat flour is most often used for bread making. The quality of the flour is determined by its gluten content. Gluten is the protein in flour largely responsible for the structure of breads. Bread flours have a high gluten content, cake flours have a lower one. All-purpose flours are intermediate in gluten content and can be used for both cake and bread making. Whole wheat and rye flours are lower in gluten content so must be used with all-purpose or bread flour to give a satisfactory product.

For quick breads, flour should be sifted before measuring to insure the careful balance of ingredients necessary for a good product. If you do not choose to sift, spoon the flour lightly into the measuring cup. Level with the straight edge of a spatula or knife. Remove 2 level tablespoons of flour from each cup. If you do not make this adjustment, you'll find breads and other baked products dry and coarse in texture. Instantized flour does not pack and so no adjustment is necessary.

Sifting is not quite so important for yeast breads because the amount of flour used varies somewhat with different lots of flour. Choose enriched or whole grain flours for the extra nutrients they provide at no extra cost.

Liquid—Milk and water are the liquids most frequently used in breads. Other liquids may be used for special flavors. Bread and rolls made with water have a wheaty flavor and crisp crust, while those made with milk have a softer crust and a velvety, creamy white crumb that browns easily in toasting.

Shortening—Some type of fat or oil is included in nearly all bread products. It interrupts or shortens the gluten strands, making the product more tender. More shortening is used in very tender products, such as biscuits, than in yeast breads. Shortening also adds flavor, and contributes to a tender crust and an attractive sheen.

Leavening agents—Leavening agents are used to make the product porous and light. Yeast, baking powder, and baking soda are frequently-used leavening agents. All release a gaseous substance (carbon dioxide) which pushes against the structure of the product causing it to rise.

Yeast is a living plant, and is available in 2 forms: active dry and compressed. One form may be substituted for another. Active dry yeast stays fresh for several months in a cool, dry place. Compressed yeast is perishable and must be kept in the refrigerator.

Salt—Salt brings out flavor and controls the action of yeast. Either plain or iodized salt may be used.

Sugar—Sugar adds flavor and helps the crust brown as the bread bakes. In yeast breads, sugar furnishes food for the yeast.

Eggs—Eggs add food value, color, and rich flavor to the breads in which they are used. They also help make the crumb fine and the crust tender.
Quick Breads

Good quick breads are made tender by using a greater proportion of shortening to flour than in yeast breads. Handling or beating is limited to minimize gluten development, thereby making the product more tender.

Flour mixtures are usually spoken of as quick breads or as yeast breads. This classification is based on the speed with which leavening occurs. Leavening or rising of muffins, biscuits, and waffles, for example, occurs with comparative rapidity so these products are known as quick breads. The action of yeast in leavening is slower.

Buttermilk Biscuits
2 cups sifted flour 1/2 teaspoon soda
3/4 teaspoon salt 5 tablespoons shortening
2 teaspoons baking powder 3/4 to 1 cup buttermilk

Sift flour, salt, baking powder, and soda into mixing bowl. Cut in shortening until finely blended. Add buttermilk. Stir with a fork just until mixture rounds up in a ball and no ingredients remain on the sides of the bowl. Turn dough onto a lightly floured board. Roll the ball around 3 or 4 times. Knead very lightly 5 or 6 times, just to smooth up the dough. Roll 3/8” thick; place biscuits on ungreased baking sheet. For soft sides, place close together; for crusty sides, place 1” apart.

Bake in center of a hot oven (450 degrees) 12 to 15 minutes or until golden brown.

Biscuits may be made softer by adding 1/4 cup more milk and dropping instead of rolling.

Biscuits may be covered with waxed paper and placed in icebox for several hours before baking.

A biscuit mix may be made by cutting fat into dry ingredients: Triple or quadruple the recipe to save time; store in a tightly covered container in a cool place. If lard is used, mix must be stored in the refrigerator. To use mix, simply add milk; roll, cut, and bake.

Sweet Milk Biscuits
2 cups sifted flour 3 to 4 tablespoons
3/4 teaspoon salt shortening
3 teaspoons baking 2/3 to 3/4 cup milk powder

Follow directions for buttermilk biscuits above.

Muffins
2 cups sifted flour 2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt 1 egg, beaten
2 teaspoons baking 1/4 cup fat, melted powder
1 cup milk

Sift together flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar. Combine egg, milk, and fat. Add to the dry ingredients all at once, stirring only enough to moisten. Fill greased muffin pans 2/3 full. Bake at 400 degrees (hot oven) about 20 minutes. Makes about 12 medium-sized muffins.

Oatmeal muffins—Substitute 1 cup quick-cooking oats for 1 cup of white flour.

Blueberry or cranberry muffins—Use 1 cup uncooked berries. Reduce milk to 3/4 cup and increase sugar to 1/4 cup. Mix berries with dry ingredients.

Peanut butter or cheese muffins—Use 1/3 cup peanut butter or 1/2 cup grated cheese and reduce fat to 2 tablespoons.

Waffles
The same proportions of ingredients are used for waffles as for muffins. If you like a very tender waffle, you may increase the amount of fat used.

Griddlecakes
The batter for griddle cakes is thinner than for muffins or waffles. Add approximately 1/2 cup milk to the muffin batter.

Popovers
1 cup sifted flour 1 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon salt 1 tablespoon melted 2 eggs, beaten shortening

Sift together flour and salt; combine eggs and milk. Add to flour mixture and beat to a smooth batter; add shortening; beat 3 minutes with rotary beater. Pour into well-greased glass custard cups or heated muffin pans, filling 1/2 full. Bake in hot oven (425 degrees) 35 to 40 minutes. Makes 6 large popovers.

Corn Breads
Much of the fame of early southern cooking came from the crusty, hot corn breads. Enriched cornmeal provides at low cost a number of important food values—thiamine, niacin, iron and other minerals, protein, and food energy.
Cornmeal is ground by 2 general methods. When it is ground between 2 large rocks or millstones, it is called waterground or rockground meal, which is whole grain meal. Meal which is ground between cylinders or rollers is called roller ground meal. Bolted meal is whole grain meal with some or all of the coarse layers of bran blown or sifted out. This makes it lighter in color. Choose whichever you like best.

Self-rising cornmeal has salt and leavening added. If you use it, omit these ingredients.

Virginia Corn Muffins

2 cups cornmeal 1 teaspoon sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder 2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon soda 2 cups buttermilk
1 teaspoon salt (more if needed)

Sift meal with dry ingredients; add milk, eggs, and fat; beat with rotary egg beater. Put batter in hot greased muffin pans and bake in hot (450 degrees) oven about 25 minutes.

Fluffy Batter Bread

1/3 cup cornmeal 3 eggs
1/4 teaspoon soda 1 cup buttermilk
2 teaspoons baking powder 1 cup sweet milk
1/2 teaspoon salt 2 tablespoons melted butter

Preheat oven very hot (475 degrees). Sift meal with other dry ingredients. Beat eggs with the 2 milks. Melt butter in pan in which bread is to be baked. Add dry ingredients to liquids. Pour immediately into a hot greased pan and place in a hot (450 degrees) oven. Bake until firm in center. Test by inserting toothpick or knife. When firm, the bread will not stick to toothpick or knife.

Corn Meal Waffles

1-3/4 cups meal 1/3 cup cooking oil
1 teaspoon salt or melted fat
2 eggs 1/4 cup flour
1-1/4 to 1-1/2 cups 1/4 teaspoon soda buttermilk
2 teaspoons baking powder

Sift salt and meal together. Beat eggs; add buttermilk and shortening; combine with sifted meal and salt. Sift flour, soda, and baking powder together and add to other mixture. Cook immediately.

Crackling Bread

2 cups cornmeal 1 cup sour milk or buttermilk
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon soda 1 cup cracklings, diced

Mix and sift together the dry ingredients. Add the cracklings. Stir in milk. Form into oblong cakes and place on greased baking pan. Bake in hot oven (450 degrees) for 30 minutes.

Hush Puppies

1/2 cup sifted flour 6 tablespoons minced onion
1-1/2 cups cornmeal 1 egg, beaten powder
3/4 cup milk
3/4 teaspoon salt

Sift together the dry ingredients. Add onion, beaten egg, and milk. Stir lightly to moisten well. Drop a scant teaspoon of batter for each hush puppy into hot deep fat (365 degrees) or frying pan with 1/2" fat in bottom. Cook until brown. Drain on absorbent paper.

Yeast Breads

Yeast breads are made by 1 of 3 methods—the Batter Method, the Straight-Dough Method, or the Sponge Method. The Batter Method is the quickest and easiest way to bake with yeast. The yeast mixture is a batter rather than a dough. It is lighter and easier to handle and requires no kneading or shaping. The batter may be quite thin or fairly thick, depending on what you are making. The yeast batter is merely mixed and then allowed to rise in the bowl or in the baking pan. The texture of the finished product is delightfully different.

The Sponge Method is one of the oldest ways of combining yeast mixtures. The mixing is done in 2 operations. First a sponge is made by combining the dissolved yeast, some sugar, and part of the flour and liquid, and allowing it to ferment until it is raised, bubbly, and spongelike. The other ingredients are added with the remaining flour to make a dough that can be kneaded. During the 3 rising periods, characteristic flavor and special lightness develop.

The Straight-Dough Method is the one with which you may be more familiar. All ingredients are mixed together to form a dough. The dough is kneaded until elastic, smooth, and satin-like. The dough is allowed to rise until doubled in bulk, punched down, shaped, and allowed to double in bulk again before baking.
Temperature control is important in making yeast breads. Yeast is a living plant and can be destroyed by too much heat; too little heat slows down its action. Active dry yeast should be dissolved in warm, not hot, water (105 degrees); compressed yeast is best dissolved in lukewarm water (95 degrees). Scalded milk should be cooled to lukewarm before combining with yeast. Temperature is also important in rising. For best results, batters and doughs should be kept at 85 degrees during the rising process. Higher temperatures cause the dough to rise too fast, resulting in a coarse-textured finished product.

Kneading is the fascinating step that makes dough "come alive" and change from a rough, sticky, unresponsive mass into a satiny-smooth, non-sticky, elastic ball. The change can actually be felt taking place as kneading progresses. To knead bread, rub a little flour on your hands and on the board. Press out the dough so it is flat. Pick up the edge farthest away from you and fold over on top of the edge nearest you. With the heels of your hands, push the dough away from you using a rocking, rolling motion. Press lightly as you push. With both hands, turn it one-fourth turn around on the board. Repeat folding, pushing, and turning, until it is smooth and elastic.

Loaf Bread (makes 4 loaves)

4 cups milk or other liquid 2 tablespoons salt
1/4 cup fat 1 to 4 packages or cakes yeast*
4 tablespoons sugar 12 or more cups enriched flour
Scald milk; add fat, sugar and salt to hot milk; cool to lukewarm; add yeast. Add 6 cups of flour and beat until smooth. Add remaining flour a cup at a time, beating after each addition until dough does not stick to side of bowl. Knead on floured board until smooth and elastic. Shape into ball; put the ball of dough, with its smooth top down, into a greased bowl. Turn it over, so the smooth side is up. Cover the bowl with a cloth and place in a warm place (80 to 85 degrees) until doubled in bulk. Test by pressing a finger tip lightly and quickly about 1/2" into the top of the dough. If the dent stays, the dough is light enough to be called "doubled in

*The larger amount of yeast will cause the bread to rise more rapidly without affecting the flavor.
bulk." If the dent fills immediately, let the dough rise about 15 minutes longer and test again.

When the dough is doubled, punch down by pushing your fist into the center of the dough. Then pull the edges of the dough to the center and turn the ball so the bottom is up.

Divide it into 4 balls. Let rest 5 to 10 minutes for easier handling and shaping.

Shape by flattening the dough into a 9" x 7" x 1" oblong, using your fingers or a rolling pin. Fold each 7" end of the oblong to the center, and overlap them slightly. Press the folded sides down firmly with the sides of your hands. Seal the dough by pinching the center "seam" and the ends. Place loaf in a greased pan 9"x5"x3". Let rise until light. Bake 50 to 60 minutes in a moderate (400 degrees) oven. A baked loaf should sound hollow when tapped. As soon as breads are done, remove them from the baking pans to cool.

**Basic Sweet Dough**

2 packages yeast, 1/4 cup shortening
compressed or 5 cups sifted enriched
dry flour
1/4 cup water 2 eggs
1 cup milk 1 teaspoon grated lem-
1/2 cup sugar on rind
2 teaspoons salt

Soften yeast in water. Scald milk; add sugar, salt and shortening; cool to lukewarm. Add enough flour to make a thick batter; mix well. Add softened yeast, eggs and lemon rind; beat well. Add more flour to make a soft dough. Turn out on lightly floured board and knead until smooth and satiny. Place in greased bowl. Cover and let rise in warm place until doubled in bulk (about 1-1/2 hours). When light, punch down; let rest 10 minutes; shape into rolls or coffee cake. Let rise until doubled (about 45 minutes). Bake in moderate oven (350 degrees) 20 to 30 minutes. Makes 2 or 3 coffee cakes or about 3-1/2 dozen rolls. Dough can be made into many shapes; fruits and nuts may be added as desired.

**Hot Cross Buns**

To 1 recipe Basic Sweet Dough add:
1 teaspoon cinnamon 1 cup currants
1/4 teaspoon allspice

After adding softened yeast and eggs, add spices and enough flour to make a soft dough. Stir in currants. Turn out on lightly floured board or pastry cloth and knead until smooth and satiny. Place in greased bowl. Cover and let rise in warm place until doubled in bulk (about 1-1/2 hours). When light, punch down; let rest 10 minutes. Divide dough into pieces about 1-1/2" in diameter. Shape each piece into a ball; place 1/2" apart in greased
pans or 1-1/2" apart on greased baking sheets. Let rise until doubled (about 45 minutes). Bake in moderate oven (350 degrees) 20 to 25 minutes. Make cross of White Icing on each roll.

**White Icing**

1 egg white
1-1/3 cups confectioners' sugar
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

Beat sugar gradually into unbeaten egg white; add vanilla extract. Drop from tip of a spoon to form crosses on rolls.

**Cinnamon Rolls**

1 recipe Basic Sweet Dough
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup sugar

Make Basic Sweet Dough; let it double in bulk, punch down and let rest for 10 minutes. While dough is resting, combine cinnamon, sugar, butter, and nuts or fruit.

Roll dough into a long rectangle; sprinkle cinnamon mixture over dough. Roll as for jelly roll; pinch along the seam to seal; cut in 1" pieces which scissors or a sharp knife. Place slices, cut side down, on a greased pan; brush tops with melted butter or margarine. Cover and let rise until double in bulk. Bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for 20 minutes or until brown.

**Sally Lunn**

2 cups scalded milk
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons salt
1 egg, slightly beaten
1/2 cup fat

Scald milk, add sugar, salt and shortening; stir to dissolve; cool to lukewarm; add yeast and beaten eggs. Add flour and beat until smooth. Cover and let rise until doubled (about 1 hour); stir down and turn batter into greased pans. Let rise until doubled (about 1 hour). Bake in moderate oven (350 degrees) for 45 minutes; turn out on rack; cool slightly. Serve warm, with margarine or butter. Separate pieces with 2 forks instead of cutting with knife.

**Crusty Hard Rolls**

1 yeast cake
1/2 cup lukewarm water
1/3 cup milk
1/3 cup hot water
1 teaspoon fat
1/2 teaspoon sugar
2-1/2 cups flour
1 egg, slightly beaten

Dissolve yeast in 1/4 cup lukewarm water. Heat milk with hot water. Add fat, sugar and salt. Stir until fat is melted; cool to lukewarm; add yeast; stir in 1 cup of flour and mix well. Add remaining flour. Beat. Put dough on floured board; knead until smooth. Place in greased bowl, brush with melted fat; cover bowl. Let rise in warm place until double in bulk (45 minutes). Form into a long roll about 1' in diameter; let rise until double in bulk (25 minutes). With scissors, cut off rolls 3" long; place on greased baking sheet. Snip 2 small gashes on top of each; brush with egg white mixed with 1/4 cup cold water. Bake on top shelf of very hot oven (450 degrees) for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 20 minutes longer. Place shallow pan of water on lower shelf of oven during baking to make steam. Brush tops of rolls with egg white twice during baking. This recipe makes 10 rolls or one loaf.

**Cheese Rolls**

(A batter-type dough)

1 pkg. yeast, compressed or dry
1 cup shredded cheese
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
1/4 lukewarm water
1 cup milk
1 egg
2 tablespoons sugar
3-1/4 cups sifted enriched flour
1 teaspoon salt
Caraway or poppy seeds, if desired

Soften yeast in water. Scald milk; add sugar, salt, shortening, shredded cheese, and onion. Cool to lukewarm. Add 1 cup flour and beat well. Add softened yeast and egg and beat well; add remaining flour to make a thick batter. Beat thoroughly until smooth. Cover and let rise in warm place until doubled (about 1 hour). When light, stir down. Drop by spoonfuls into greased muffin pans. Brush with milk and sprinkle with caraway or poppy seed. Let rise until doubled (about 45 minutes). Bake in moderate oven (350 degrees) about 25 minutes. Makes 18 puffs.
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