

Homemade Bread

From the Kitchen of Karen Nelson, Bertrand

Ingredients

2 cups water — hot from tap
¼ cup vegetable oil
1½ teaspoon salt
⅓ cup sugar
2 teaspoons loose yeast
4½ to 5½ cups flour (prefer bread flour, but all purpose will work)

Instructions:

Using a stand mixer:

In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine everything but the flour. Whisk thoroughly. Allow to stand about 10 minutes. The yeast will bloom and look fluffy. Add 4½ cups of flour. Using the dough hook, start the mixer on the lowest setting. Move it up to speed 2 once the flour is incorporated enough to stop splashing out of the bowl. When dough starts looking smooth, assess the situation. Add additional flour, up to 1 cup, in ¼-cup increments, to make a dough that isn't sticky but isn't hard. Then allow the mixer to knead the dough on speed 2 or 4 for 8 to 10 minutes. (Make sure the mixer doesn't walk itself off the counter.)

By hand:

In a large mixing bowl, combine everything but the flour. Whisk thoroughly. Allow to stand about 10 minutes. The yeast will bloom and look fluffy. Add about 2 cups of flour. Use a large spoon to stir and continue adding flour until dough is too difficult to stir. Then, flour or oil hands, and knead. Continue to add flour in ¼- to ½-cup increments to make a dough that isn't sticky but isn't hard. Then knead the dough for 8 to 10 minutes.

Raising:

Remove the dough to a lightly floured surface and knead by hand to make a smooth ball. Dough is the right consistency if it relaxes on the floured surface (sort of like a little kid about to fall asleep). Spray a mixing bowl, place the dough in it, spray the dough, and cover with a clean towel. Place the dough in a warm place (such as a sunny spot on the table, or an oven with a light or pilot light) and allow to raise until doubled. Punch it down, and allow it to raise again. (A third time is good but not necessary if time doesn't allow.)

Baking:

This will make two loaves or one 10x15 pan of rolls. If using loaf pans, spray the pans and set an oblong ball of dough in the center of each. If using a baking stone, set two dough balls on the surface so that each ball is centered in half the space (or you can make one giant loaf right in the middle). If making rolls, spray the pan and arrange smooth, consistent-sized balls of dough four wide and six across. Allow dough to raise about 30 minutes while oven preheats to 375 degrees. With the rack in the center of the oven, bake 30 to 35 minutes or until internal temperature is 190 degrees.

Remove to wire rack to cool. Allow to cool at least 20 minutes before slicing with a serrated knife or electric knife. (If you try to slice immediately, the bread is more likely to crush than cut.)

Ways to make this bread more fun:

Substitute up to half the flour with whole wheat or rye flour, adding this flour before the regular flour. Add seeds, other grains, or nuts to the dough before adding flour. Make additions prior to adding flour, and be aware to reduce flour accordingly. Options could include rolled oats (quick or old fashioned), millet, milo, corn meal, flax, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, walnuts, pecans — just have at it. begins. Pour into patriotic bowl and serve!

