

A Recipe for Rye Bread

The more I make bread, the more I am convinced of the importance of the kitchen being in the best position in the house. When we designed and built our house, I was determined that the kitchen should have a view and be on the front of the house. Now that it's six-fifteen of a summer morning and I'm up early, kneading bread, because we've run out again, I'm especially happy to be looking out over a sun-soaked landscape to the distant mountains. Every time you make bread you're guaranteed a good ten minutes of contemplation as you knead it, the mechanical rhythmic activity frees the mind to wander or switch off...very therapeutic. Having a view thrown in as well is just an added bonus.

I haven't always made bread. It is a comparatively recent development. Making jam was the first breakthrough into self-sufficiency, then came the day when our local supplier of rye bread, who made a loaf that (miracle of miracles), all the children would eat, decided to switch recipes and use caraway in it...instant rejection by the whole family.

We'd stopped the wheat bread to try and help my son's allergies and found it helped most of us, so apart from the occasional indulgence of fluffy white bread, I wanted to stay off it. There was no alternative; I would have to take the leap into bread making. The main reason that I'd resisted was that it seemed to take so long. First the mixing and kneading, then the rising, then knocking down and forming loaves, a second rising and finally the baking. Who could keep track of all that in the chaotic life of a three-child family?

So eventually I take the plunge, turn to my friend Nigel (Slater, not namedropping but he and Nigella (Lawson) are ever-present in my kitchen, in book format of course) and find a foolproof recipe for a white loaf, simpler to start off with white I think. Well the first try produced a reasonable, if huge, loaf, and though my son still remembers that it was a bit doughy in the middle. Second try, I got two pretty perfect loaves and I was on a roll.

Now to find a recipe for rye bread. It seems that 100% rye is usually made by the sour dough method and I couldn't see my family going for that, so settle for a half and half rye/whole-wheat recipe... triumph. Ok, my son the food connoisseur complained it was a bit too sweet, so next time round I reduced the amount of honey, but this recipe has been our staple diet ever since, and I am now truly ensconced in my kitchen, looking at the view, every other day, while I endeavor to keep the supply level with the ever increasing demand.

Any way, finally to the recipe:

500g rye flour
450g whole-wheat flour plus more for kneading
50g plain flour
1 tablespoon salt
1 10g sachet of instant yeast
1 tablespoon honey
3 tablespoons oil
670 ml milk
125 ml water

Warm the milk to lukewarm. Mix the flours and salt in a large bowl. Make a well in the middle and put in the yeast, then honey, then oil, pour on the warmed milk and water and mix. When it gets doughy turn out on to a well floured surface (it will be extremely sticky) and knead for 10 minutes. You will need to keep adding flour as you knead. It is better for it to be too sticky than too dry – you can always add more flour, but too dry will make a dry, hard loaf. After 10 minutes, put it back into the bowl with a plastic bag over it and leave in a warmish place for two hours or so. Then knock down, firmly pressing out the air, but not over kneading, then form into two or three loaves on a baking sheet, cover again and leave to rise for another hour. Then bake for 30 minutes at 190C until they sound hollow when you tap on the bottom of the loaf. Cool on a wire rack

So how do I keep track of the bread making, in between school runs, mealtimes and the rest? Well I don't always. There are times when I optimistically start the bread off, leave it to rise and four hours later remember about it, knock it down, forget to switch on the oven so it has had an extra day or so in rising time by the time it gets cooked. It does seem to be very forgiving though – whatever you do to it, you do generally get bread out at the end, it may not always be the perfect loaf, but then variety is the spice of life after all. There was one time it hadn't quite finished cooking by the time I had to do the school run, so I asked my husband to take it out in ten minutes..... By the time I got back we had a very useful weapon against intruders. We didn't eat that one...I think it was rivet for lunch...!

About the Author

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