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Opening extract from

Children's Book of Baking Bread

Written by

Abigail Wheatley

Published by

Usborne Publishing Ltd

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Bread basics

Bread comes in an amazing variety of shapes, sizes and styles, from soft and puffy to thin and crisp – but many types of bread use similar basic ingredients. Here you'll find out more about them, and how they work together to make bread.

Basic ingredients

Many breads start as a dough made of flour, water and yeast. The flour makes bread good to eat. The yeast makes the bread light and airy. Water is needed to hold the flour together, and to get the yeast working.

When yeast becomes warm and wet, it gives off tiny bubbles of gas that make the dough rise. When the dough is baked in an oven, the yeast gets too hot to work and the dough stops rising.



Types of flour

Bread is often made with a type of wheat flour called 'strong' flour or 'bread' flour. When it is pushed and stretched it becomes stronger and stretchier than normal flour. This helps the bread to rise and hold together well.

There are different types of strong or bread flour. The wholemeal type contains all the parts of the crushed wheat grains. The white type is made by removing the heavier parts of the grains.

Bread flour can be made from different grains such as rye or maize (corn).

Leaving dough to rise

In many bread recipes, you need to leave the dough to rise until it has doubled in size. If you leave your dough at room temperature, this may take several hours. It will rise more quickly if you put it in a warm place. This could be...



... a sunny windowsill (with the window closed).

... your oven, if you turn it to 100°C, 225°F or gas mark ¼, leave for 5 minutes, turn off the heat, then put in your dough.

... a breadmaking machine, if it has a setting that lets you put the dough inside to rise (check the manual).

Hand-hot water



Most bread recipes use warm water. To get the right temperature, half-fill a jug with hot water, then fill it up with cold water. Put your hand in. It should feel slightly hotter than your hand.

If it's too cold, add more hot water; if it's too hot, add more cold. When it's just right, pour any extra away so you have the right amount.



Types of yeast

You can buy different types of yeast for breadmaking. All the recipes in this book use 'fast action' yeast, which is also called 'quick' or 'easy bake' yeast. It keeps for a long time, but it doesn't last forever. Follow the use-by date printed on the packaging.

Is it cooked?

To find out if a loaf of bread is cooked, wear oven gloves to take it out of the oven and remove any tins. Turn the bread upside down and tap it with your knuckles. If it sounds hollow then it's done. If not, bake for 10 minutes more, then try again.

Breadmaking skills

You'll find some handy hints and tips here that will help you with the basic skills you'll need when you're making the recipes in this book.

Kneading bread

1. Push the heels of your hands into the lump of dough and push away from you, to stretch out the dough.





If it's very sticky, sprinkle on a little flour.

2. Pick up the far edge of the dough and bring it towards you, folding it back over the rest of the dough. Then, repeat steps 1 and 2 again and again.



3. Every now and then, turn the dough a quarter of the way around on the work surface. Knead and turn until the dough is smooth and springy. Then, do the test below.



The windowpane test

To test if you have kneaded enough, break off a small piece of dough. Stretch it out very gently, until it is so thin you can see light through it. If you can do this without tearing it, it is ready. If it tears, knead for a few minutes more, then test again.

Machine kneading

You can use a stand mixer with a dough hook to knead your dough. Read the manual first. Knead for the amount of time the recipe says, then stop the mixer and do the windowpane test.



Rubbing butter into flour

1. Use the tips of your fingers and thumbs to squash and rub the butter, so it starts mixing with the flour. Let the mixture drop back into the bowl as you rub.



2. Keep on picking up more of the mixture and rubbing. The lumps of butter will get smaller. Stop when they are the size of small breadcrumbs.



Breaking eggs

Crack the egg sharply on the edge of a bowl. Pull the shell apart, so the whites and yolk slide into the bowl. Pick out any bits of shell.



Separating eggs



Break an egg onto a plate. Cover the yolk with an egg cup. Hold the egg cup and tip the plate, so the egg white slides off into a bowl.

Oiling & lining

To oil a bowl, tin or some plastic food wrap, pour on 1/2 teaspoonful of cooking oil. Use a pastry brush to brush it over the surface.

To line a tin, box or tray, put it on some baking parchment. Draw around it, using a pencil.



Cut out the shape, cutting just inside the pencil line. Put the shape in the bottom of the tin, box or tray.

Basic bread

Ingredients:

500g (17½oz) strong white bread flour, plus a little extra for dusting

40g (1½oz) butter

1 teaspoon fast action yeast

1 teaspoon salt

300ml (10floz) hand-hot water

You will also need a 900g (2lb) loaf tin.

Makes 1 loaf or 12 rolls

This plain white loaf is a great recipe to start with. See 'Other ideas' (below) if you don't have a loaf tin, or want to adapt the recipe to make wholemeal bread.



1. Put the flour into a big bowl. Cut the butter into chunks and add them to the flour.



2. Use the tips of your fingers and thumbs to rub the butter into the flour (see page 11) until the mixture looks like small breadcrumbs.



3. Add the yeast and salt and stir them in. Add the hand-hot water and stir it in. Use your hands to bring the mixture into a ball of dough.



4. Sprinkle a little flour on a clean surface. Put the dough on the surface. Knead it (see page 10) for about 10 minutes until it feels smooth and springy. Put it back in the bowl.

Other ideas

For a wholemeal loaf, replace the white bread flour with strong wholemeal bread flour and use 325ml (11floz) water.

If you don't have a loaf tin, line a baking tray with parchment. After step 6, shape the dough into a ball, then follow steps 8 and 9.

5. Cover the bowl tightly with plastic food wrap. Put it in a warm place for around 50 minutes, or until the dough has doubled in size.



6. Put the dough back on the floured surface. Knead gently for 2 minutes, to squeeze out the tiny air bubbles.





7. Oil the tin (see page 11). Put the dough in and use your fingers to stretch it out so it covers the base of the tin. Dust the top with flour. Use a sharp knife to cut 4 lines across the top.



8. Cover with a clean tea towel. Put in a warm place for 30 minutes until it has doubled in size. Remove the tea towel. Heat the oven to 220°C, 425°F or gas mark 7.



9. Bake for 25–30 minutes (or 15–10 minutes for rolls) until golden-brown on top. Wearing oven gloves, hold the tin upside down and shake out the loaf. Test to see if it's cooked (see page 9). Put on a wire rack to cool.