

Indian or Thirded Bread Recipes

I got interested in thirded breads by chance: I happened on something on the internet that purported to be a history of B&H Boston Brown Bread. The history claimed that early New England colonists, lacking ovens, cooked their bread in coffee cans. Being aware that canned coffee was unknown in 18th-century New England--indeed, 18th-century anywhere--I started looking for more history, especially more reliable history, and found--not much. Academic historians, most of them, don't pay much attention to recipes.

But I was delighted to learn that Boston Brown Bread actually has a pedigree: it's descended from a long line of thrifty "thirded breads," developed by English housewives to eke out supplies of expensive wheat flour. In England, they'd combine wheat with rye and oat flours; in the New World, they'd use Indian corn instead of oats. Rye stayed in the mix due to the practice of intercropping it with wheat, something farmers did to ensure that they got a harvest of something at any rate. If the weather was good, they'd harvest wheat and rye; if not, they'd at least get some rye. Corn was more plentiful than oats, of course; in fact, we could probably include traditional American corn bread, corn pone, and corn dodgers as at least cousins of the thirded bread family. At some point the intent shifts from stretching out your supply of wheat to using a bit of wheat to hold a non-wheat dough together--we even see a bit of wheat in corn tortillas now.

This venerable thrifty tradition was the source of one of my favorite breads, Anadama. The origin of the name is obscure; there are a couple of legends, neither believable. The current definition is wheat bread with some corn meal and molasses; rye has somehow dropped out, probably because the entire flour marketplace has shifted significantly in the last two centuries in North America.

To oversimplify, if you bake thirded bread, sweetened with molasses, in an oven, you get Anadama bread; if you steam it in a closed vessel in a kettle, you get Boston brown bread, or Gurnet bread (see below).

Sourdough Thirded Bread

Adapted from Brian Connors' "Sourdough Rye and Indian Bread," below

Proportions can be varied. The challenge is to stretch the wheat flour out and make a decent loaf with as little wheat as possible, like an 18th-century English or American housewife on a tight budget.

The baking schedule seems a little off to me. I would try starting it at 425°F for 10 minutes, then dropping it to 325°F for 20-25 minutes (or, for extra credit and to mimic an 18th-century oven, just 10 minutes, dropping it to 275°F for the finish).

- 1 c boiling water
- 2 Tbsp molasses
- 1 c stone-ground cornmeal
- 1 c sourdough starter
- tepid water as needed ($\frac{1}{2}$ -1 c)
- 1½ c bread flour¹
- 1½ c stone-ground rye flour
- 2 Tbsp oil²
- 2 tsp salt (add late in the mixing process)
- 1 c water for baking

Dissolve molasses in boiling water. Add cornmeal and stir till lumps are gone. Let cool to about 100°F.

In the bowl of a standing mixer with a dough hook, mix sourdough starter with 1/2 cup of tepid water. Add cornmeal mixture, bread flour, rye flour, and oil. Mix until dough comes together, adding flour or water as needed to form a slightly stretchy mass. It will be sticky. Late in this process, add salt.

Cover and let rise at room temperature 3-4 hours. Volume may not quite double.

¹ In the 18th century this would probably be something like today's stoneground whole wheat flour (see <http://colonialbaker.net/Reproduction%20Biscuit%20article%20JOTEA%202011.pdf>). This flour will have to do a lot of lifting, though, so make sure it's high-protein, high-gluten, etc., and if you cheat a little and use white I won't rat you out.

² If you were a real 18th-century peasant housewife, you'd use lard.

Grease two loaf pans. Turn dough out onto a floured work surface and form into two loaves, place in the bread pans, cover, and let rise 1½ hours.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Slash tops of loaves down the center with a sharp blade. Put loaves in oven, splashing ½ cup of water on the floor of the oven to provide steam. Splash again 5 minutes later. (Or: put a wide shallow pan with 1 c water in it into the oven with the loaves.)

Bake 40-50 minutes (or less--see note on baking schedule above). Turn out of pans onto racks immediately and let cool 30 minutes.

Frona Spooner's Gurnet Brown Bread

Adapted from <https://www.themagnificentleaven.com/recipes> via <http://plymouthantiquarian.org/events/pilgrim-breakfast/>

This is a soda-rising bread, collected from Frona Spooner (c1840 - 1917) of Plymouth, Massachusetts. "The Gurnet" was a popular location for seaside chowder parties.

2 cups rye flour
2 cups Indian (corn) meal
1 cup wheat flour
1/3 cup molasses
1 level teaspoon soda
1 1/2 pints milk (can substitute cold water)

Combine dry ingredients, wet ingredients, then both. Mix briefly and put in a pudding mold. Steam in a kettle for 4 hours.

Frona mentions a wheat-free (but not gluten-free) variation: 2 1/2 cups each rye flour and cornmeal with 1 cup sour milk with 2 cups of water.

This variation is sized for 14.4-oz diced-tomato cans (#300 size, about 4 1/2" tall and 3" across. To prepare cans, remove lids; blunt or remove any sharp edges or projections. Grease them well. Prepare an aluminum foil cap for each can.

Regular

139g rye flour
167g Indian (corn) meal
94g wheat flour
3g baking soda
4g salt (or to taste)
77g molasses
50g yogurt
450g milk (can substitute cold water)
raisins (optional)

Gluten-free

105g oat flour
167g Indian (corn) meal
94g Bob's 1 to 1 flour
3g baking soda
4g salt (or to taste)
77g molasses
50g yogurt
400g milk (can substitute cold water)
raisins (optional)

Before mixing, set up your steamer: ideally a large stock pot with a steamer insert, less ideally a large stock pot with a trivet or whatever you can come up with on the bottom. Make sure it's tall

enough for the cans plus whatever dough expands from their tops. Put about an inch of water in it and bring it to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.

Combine dry ingredients, wet ingredients, then both to make a medium-thick batter--not kneadable, not quite pourable either. Put into cans, filling each can about $\frac{2}{3}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Cover tops with aluminum foil to keep steam from settling in the batter. Set in steamer. Steam 2-3 hours (check the water now and then). Test for doneness by inserting a skewer into the center of the loaf; if it comes out clean, you're done.

Getting the hot cans out will be tricky. I've had good luck with a pair of tongs and a potholder.

Let the bread cool 10-15 minutes in the cans, then take it out. You may have to go around the loaves with a long thin knife to get them out.

You can also bake these in loaf pans covered with aluminum foil. Either fits a 9x5" loaf pan, but you can squeeze the gluten-free version into an 8x4". Allow about an hour for baking at 375 - 325°F; the internal temperature should reach about 200°F.

Paula Marcoux's updated version

[edited]

Makes 2 medium loaves, filling a couple regular-sized coffee cans. It freezes perfectly. The major technical consideration is boiling a pot of water for a few hours.

The first time you make this you may have to fiddle around to figure out your moulds. Crimping on foil works fine for lids, so don't sweat that detail.

- 2 cups (9 ounces) whole rye meal
- 2 cups (11 ounces) medium or coarse cornmeal, 8-row flint corn preferred
- 1 cup (4 ½ ounces) whole wheat flour or meal
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 cups buttermilk or combination of milk and plain yogurt
- ⅓ cup molasses
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 tablespoons warm water
- optional: 1 - 1½ cups raisins (not Frona's thing)

Fit a large pot with a rack. Make sure the molds will fit in with a little room around and over. Add water to just cover the rack, and set the pot on to boil.

Prepare moulds by greasing them and pre-fitting squares of heavy-duty foil.

In a large bowl, whisk together the meals and salt. In a separate bowl whisk together the buttermilk and molasses. In a third bowl, combine the soda and water in a little dish.

Stir the liquid into the dry ingredients, and scrape the mixture into the molds, aiming to get them about ¾ full. Pop the foil on top and crimp down smooth along the outside of the cans. Place in the steamer and keep at a simmer for 3 hours. (Less time for teeny molds -- say an hour for tomato paste cans!) Check water level periodically, and add boiling water from the teakettle as needed.

Take the breads out of the steamer carefully with mitts, remove foil lids, and place on a rack to cool 10 minutes. After the rest period, pick up each can and shake it back and forth a bit; the bread will loosen up from the edges. Sometimes a discreet whack upside down on the counter is persuasive. Then shake it out of the can gently onto the rack and turn upright to cool completely. Brown bread slices most cleanly when cool.

Rye and Indian or Thirded bread

From Brian Connors' old Geocities page, now archived at oocities.org. Flaky link:

<http://www.oocities.org/connorbd/food/recipes/ryeindianbread.html>

This is my interpretation of an early American bread recipe not much eaten anymore. It's fairly heavy due to the limited amount of gluten, and the dough is very sticky. It does not seem to adapt well to bread machine use. This recipe is largely here because it's very, very hard to find an authentic recipe anywhere that's less than a hundred years old; it simply fell out of favor as wheat became cheaper, and not too many people make bread on their own anymore.

These are essentially colonial style recipes (which traditionally used equal amounts of cornmeal, wheat, and rye flours); there are a very few more modern recipes that use greater amounts of wheat flour for more lift. If you don't like heavy bread, Cooking Light magazine has a lighter version at myrecipes.com, as does the original edition of the Boston Cooking School Cook Book by Fannie Merritt Farmer (under "thirded" or "third bread").

UPDATE 2/17/2008: I've added a second recipe below, as well as more sources. The recipe is a sourdough version of this one, made a little more traditionally; the proportions are similar to the first, with a bit more wheat flour in it from a sourdough starter.

The new sources: the [Old Sturbridge Village Cookbook](#) from Globe Pequot Press and the *Plymouth Colony Cookbook* from the [Plymouth Antiquarian Society](#) in Plymouth, MA. Interestingly, the Plymouth version is rather more elaborate, including milk and molasses when the OSV version does not.

Straight yeasted Rye and Indian

- 1 c stone-ground cornmeal
- 1 1/2 c white bread flour
- 1 1/2 c rye flour
- 1 c boiling water
- 3/4-1 c room temperature water
- 2 tbsp molasses
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 pkt yeast
- butter to grease pan

Dissolve the molasses in the boiling water and mix with cornmeal; let sit 15-20 minutes to soften the cornmeal and cool. Add cool water and the rye and wheat flours and mix in a standing mixer with a dough hook for 5 minutes, then let rise twice for an hour and a half each time, then another half hour to an hour. Preheat the oven to 400F with a cast iron frying pan; melt butter in

hot pan to cover, then turn out dough into pan. Turn dough out into pan in a round loaf and bake 45-50 minutes at 375F. Cool on a wire rack and serve with something colonial.

Sourdough Rye and Indian

Adding onto the above recipe, this was done to break a ciabatta rut I'd been in. This is perhaps a bit closer to the original, and strongly resembles a very coarse honey health bread. Like any molasses bread, it mates nicely with butter, though it's also a bit strongly flavored for my taste. Good toasting bread though.

The proportions here are a little weird, but you can easily tweak them just by using a rye/wheat starter instead of a straight wheat starter like I used. The starter is roughly a 50/50 mix of flour and water, and is based on the culture from carlsfriends.org.

1 1/2 c bread flour
1 1/2 c stone-ground rye flour
1 c stone-ground cornmeal
1 c sourdough starter
1 c boiling water
2 tbsp molasses
2 tsp kosher salt
tepid water as necessary (1/2 to 1 c)

1. Dissolve molasses in boiling water, then add cornmeal and stir till lumps are gone. Let sit until cooled to about 100F.
2. In the bowl of a standing mixer, mix the sourdough starter with 1/2 cup of tepid water, then add the cornmeal mixture along with the salt, rye flour, and bread flour. Mix with a dough hook until dough comes together, adding water as necessary to form a single, slightly stretchy mass. Do not overmix.
3. Cover and rise at room temperature for 3-4 hours. Volume may not quite double.
4. Grease two loaf pans (a parchment liner is optional but suggested). Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface and form into two equally-sized logs, then place in the bread pans and allow to rise, covered, for 1 1/2 hours.
5. Preheat oven to 375F. Slash the tops of the loaves down the center with a razor blade. Put the bread in the oven, splashing 1/2 cup of water on the floor of the oven to provide steam (repeat five minutes into the baking process). Bake 40-50 minutes, until the internal temperature of the bread reads 200-210F.

Results (8/1/2020):

Baked two loaves with the second (sourdough) recipe. Used white flour starter from Spring 2020 and a bit more whole wheat flour than the other two flours to make dough solid and not so sticky. Kneaded in ~2 Tbsp of oil; added salt during the kneading, not mixing phase.

Rising was very slow (as expected)--first rising took 4 hours, second went overnight (maybe too long--loaves were low, not above the lip of the pan, and had little holes on top), Bread came out small, coarse-textured (not doughy), chewy, tasty, not very sour.

Next time: try white or higher-gluten wheat flour where Connors says "bread flour." My goal here is to replicate what a low-income 18th century English or American housewife might have made.