

Easy Bread



Makes 3 braids a bit over 1 lb. each or 2 large braids (may also be baked in bread pans)

2 c. flour (white, wheat, rye) (you will need a total of 7-8 cups flour)

¼ c. sugar

1 T. salt

2 pkg. active dry yeast

Combine the above ingredients in a large mixing bowl.



Combine:

2 ¼ c. milk (you may use fresh milk or reconstituted dry milk.)

¼ c. cooking oil

Heat in saucepan or microwaves (takes about 1 ½ - 2 minutes in the microwave) to 120-125 degrees. If it gets too hot, let it cool to between 120-125 degrees or you will kill the yeast.)



Add:

1 egg to the milk/oil mixture. Add the wet to the dry ingredients. Beat 30 seconds with an electric mixer at low speed. Then beat for 3 minutes at medium speed.

Mix in another 2-3 cups of flour just until the dough leaves the side of the bowl. You still want it to be a bit wet and sticky.



A friend gave me this silicone mat several years ago. I love it for kneading bread!

Dump the bread onto a well floured surface and **knead in add another 2-3 cups flour**. The amount will depend on the humidity of your flour and your kitchen. You will want the dough to be smooth but not too dry. It should be just a tiny bit tacky but not sticky when you're finished so your finished bread will be moist and not dry.



Knead about one minute on floured surface or until smooth and elastic. If you've never kneaded bread before, click the link for the technique. Because we've already used the mixer to knead for 3 minutes, you will only have to knead this dough for a minute or two. Just like a baby's bottom!



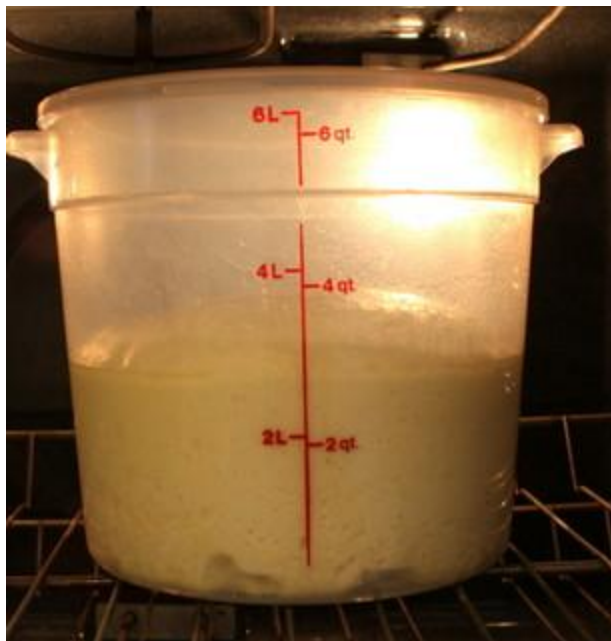
Rising

Place dough in a greased 2 ½ qt. bowl. Turn to grease all sides. Cover and let rise in a warm place (80-85 degrees) until light and doubled about 45-60 min. I like to put the light on in the oven and place the bowl or container in there to rise.



I like this container from King Arthur flour because I can see how much the bread has risen. If you don't have one, you can poke two fingers in the center of the dough. If it bounces back, it's ready.

Hello, Big Boy!



Shape and Bake

Punch the dough down and let rest for 5 minutes covered with a clean dish towel.



Divide into 2-3 equal pieces. If making 2 loaves - 1.5 lbs each. If making 3, they should weigh about 1 lb. each. Cover the remaining dough so it doesn't dry out while you roll the first loaf.

I like to make braids with this dough. They're so pretty and easy to do. Begin by rolling out the dough as you would a pie crust. You'll want it about $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick.



Cut the dough into 3 pieces. If they're not perfectly even, that's ok.



The bubbles mean your bread is alive...that's good!

Now, beginning with the long side, roll each piece tightly to form a nice tight roll.



It's time to braid! Start by laying the rolls over one another and tucking the end under. From there, just braid like you would your hair. When you get to the end. Tuck it under.



Place the braid onto a baking sheet that has been lined with parchment or a Silpat liner.. I like to use half sheet cake pans because I can bake two loaves at one time. Repeat with the other loaf. Don't worry if they're not perfect.



Cover with a clean dish towel and let rise in warm place until light 30-45 minutes. Oven with light on is perfect once again. Remove the bread from the oven. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

While the oven is heating, **mix 1 egg white with about 1 teaspoon of water**. Beat with a fork or whisk until frothy. Use a pastry brush to brush the loaves generously with the egg white mixture. This will give your bread beautiful color and shine.



Place the loaves into the preheated oven and bake for 20-25 min. for braids, 30-45 min. for loaves. or until bread sounds hollow when tapped on bottom. Remove from pans immediately. Cool on a rack...if you can wait that long!



Are they not beautiful?
You did it!

Charlene Driggs
May Arts Ribbon Royal Ribbonista