

Yeast Breads and Rolls

KNEADING BREAD

The cook who bakes good bread—firm, flavorful, fragrant—knows how to knead. The motion is simple but tricky to describe. When the dough, forming a sort of ball in shape, has been turned out of the bowl onto a lightly floured board, it should be folded over toward the cook, then pressed down and away from the cook with the heel of the hand. The ball is turned a quarter circle, the motion repeated, and so on until the texture is smooth and elastic. The board may be sprinkled lightly with additional flour from time to time; but no more flour should be kneaded in than is necessary. The kneading process takes 8 to 10 minutes.

An electric mixer with a dough hook is a great convenience in bread making. The bread dough should be kneaded for about 5 minutes with the hook.

Almost any bread can be made in a food processor fitted with the metal blade. Once the ingredients are mixed, process the dough until it pulls away from the sides of the container. The dough is then completely kneaded.

DISSOLVING YEAST

Yeast must be dissolved in liquid to make it active. The liquid should be warm (110 to 115°F) to be most effective.

ALLOWING DOUGH TO RISE

When making bread, the temperature of the dough should be kept as close as possible to 85°F. One good way to maintain this gentle warmth is to put the bowl of dough in an oven with just the pilot light

on. Or stand the bowl of dough in a large pan or a sink filled with lukewarm water. As the water cools, reheat it by adding hot water, but do not keep the dough warm over a hot burner. Dough may be shaped when doubled in bulk and an impression remains when pressed with a finger.

SHAPING LOAVES

After the dough has risen, punch down and divide into portions for the desired number of loaves. Form into balls and allow to rest about 10 minutes on a lightly floured board. Shape into loaves by pressing the ball of dough into an oblong about 9 × 7 × 1 inches. Fold each end of the oblong to the center, overlapping the ends slightly. Press each side down firmly and pinch along the center to keep the ends sealed and the dough in shape. Place the loaves, sealed edges down, in greased bread pans. Brush the tops with melted shortening, cover with a towel and let rise until doubled in bulk.



FRENCH BREAD

1 LOAF

1 cup lukewarm water
1½ teaspoons salt
1 package (1 tablespoon) yeast
1 tablespoon soft shortening
3½ to 3¾ cups flour
Sesame or poppy seeds

1 Combine the water and salt; add the yeast and stir until yeast is well dissolved. Add the shortening.

2 Stir in the flour, ½ cup at a time. Continue adding enough flour to make a stiff dough.

3 When the dough begins to leave the sides of the bowl, turn it out onto a lightly floured board. Knead until the dough is smooth and elastic and does not stick to the board.

4 Place the dough in a greased bowl, turning once to bring the greased side up. Cover with a damp cloth and let rise in a warm place (80 to 85°F) until doubled in bulk, or 1½ to 2 hours. (Dough has doubled when 2 fingers, pressed into it, leave an indentation.)

5 Punch the dough down, fold over edges of dough and turn it upside down. Cover and let rise again until almost doubled in bulk, or 30 to 45 minutes.

6 Roll the dough into an oblong, 15 × 10 inches. Starting from a wide side, roll the dough up tightly as for a jelly roll. Pinch the edges together to seal. With a hand on each end of the roll, roll gently back and forth to lengthen the loaf and taper the ends.

7 Place the loaf diagonally on a baking sheet that has been lightly greased and sprinkled with cornmeal. With a sharp knife, make ¼-inch slashes in the dough at 2-inch intervals, or 1 lengthwise slash. Brush the top with cold water and let stand, uncovered, about 1½ hours. Brush again with cold water.

8 Bake in a preheated 425°F oven 10 minutes. Brush again with water, reduce oven temperature to 375°F and bake 10 minutes longer. Brush with water again, sprinkle with sesame or poppy seeds and continue baking until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes longer.

Note: For more glaze and less crustiness, in place of the plain water brush with 1 egg white slightly beaten with 1 tablespoon water.

FRENCH BREAD CROÛTES

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place slices of French bread, ½ inch thick, on a baking sheet and butter generously on one side. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, turning once. The croûtes are done when they are crisp and brown. Use for fish soup or as a base for slices or pieces of other foods.

Variations

GARLIC-FLAVORED CHEESE CROÛTES

Rub the outside of a crusty loaf of French bread with garlic. Cut the bread into slices ¼ inch thick. Brush the slices with oil and place on a baking sheet. Bake until golden. Turn once. Sprinkle with grated Parmesan or Swiss cheese and bake just until the cheese melts.

TABASCO CROÛTES

Preheat oven to 375°F. Cut French bread on the diagonal into ½-inch slices. Melt ¼ cup butter and stir in 1 garlic clove, minced, and ¼ teaspoon Tabasco sauce. Brush the mixture on the cut surfaces of the bread. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until hot and toasted.