

BASIC BREAD-MAKING TECHNIQUES

Homemade breads need not be wrapped in mystery. On this page you'll find the information you need for success in just about every yeast bread recipe. We provide the how-to of bread-making techniques along with the reasons behind them. If there are any areas where you'd like special help, just write. We'll be happy to answer your questions.

Mixing: The yeast and flour manufacturers have put their heads together and come up with a step-saver that assures more consistent results. In your mixer bowl, just stir together about half the flour and the undissolved yeast. The step of dissolving the yeast in warm water has been eliminated in many yeast bread recipes, but if you feel more comfortable dissolving the yeast go ahead: it will work either way.

Next, add the warm liquid ingredients and beat with an electric mixer. This beating stage begins the important process of developing the gluten, the bread's framework. Now stir in as much flour as necessary, by hand, to make a moderately stiff dough (one that comes out of the bowl in a mass, rather than pouring). There will be some flour left over for kneading.

Kneading: Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface. (The flour used for kneading is part of the measured amount.) You will want to flour your hands, too, because a moderately stiff dough is still sticky. When your recipe gives a range for the amount of flour, start with the smaller amount, adding only enough extra flour to make the dough easy to handle. Using more flour than necessary makes the dough stiff and less manageable during kneading and shaping, producing heavier bread or rolls.

To knead dough, curve your fingers over the dough, pull it toward you, then push it down and away from you with the heel of your hand. (1) Give the dough a quarter turn, fold the dough toward you, and push it down again. You'll need to add flour till the dough loses its stickiness. (On humid days the dough will take more flour.) Keep repeating the kneading motions until the dough is smooth.

Kneading is the key step to a good loaf of bread. This process develops the gluten in the flour into long thin strands. As yeast grows, it gives off carbon dioxide which is trapped in the gluten strands. This stretches the gluten, flour's elastic protein, giving the bread its high, light texture. Firm kneading strokes develop long strands of gluten, giving bread small uniform holes and a fine

texture. Rough or too vigorous kneading breaks and shortens the gluten strands, causing large holes and poor volume. Knead till the dough develops a life of its own. It will feel elastic and respond to your touch. Kneading usually takes about eight to ten minutes. Don't worry; you can't knead the dough too long.

Rising: A constant temperature of 80 degrees F. is ideal for the rising of yeast bread. During rising, the yeast grows and passes off carbon dioxide which is trapped by the gluten, causing the mass of dough to be stretched.

You'll need to provide a warm place for the dough to rise. Place it on the top rack of a cold oven, and put a pan of hot water on the lower rack. (2) Or, if you prefer, just set the bowl of dough on your kitchen counter, making sure that the rising dough is protected from any drafts. The rising times given in recipes are approximate; actual rising time depends upon temperature and humidity in your kitchen.

To prevent the surface of the dough from becoming dry and hard as it rises, place it in a light-

ly greased bowl, turning once to completely coat its surface. Cover the coated dough loosely with waxed paper and a damp kitchen towel. To tell if the rising is completed and the dough has doubled in bulk, press two fingers lightly 1/2 inch into the dough. (3) If the indentation remains, the dough is ready for shaping.

Punch the dough down by pushing your fist into the center. Then, pull the edges of the dough to the center, turn the dough over, and place it on a lightly floured surface.

Shaping: Various methods can be used to shape dough but first let the dough rest, covered, about ten minutes after it has been punched down and divided into a manageable size. This resting allows the gluten strands to relax, making the dough less elastic and much easier to handle. Handling the dough during shaping bursts any large air bubbles and produces bread with a smooth, even exterior.

To shape dough into a loaf, roll into a 12x8-inch rectangle. Make sure you roll to outer edges to pop any air bubbles. Roll rec-

tangle up tightly, starting with the eight-inch edge. As you roll, seal with fingertips. (4) Be sure to seal the seam completely by pinching the dough together. Also seal the ends by pinching each into a thin sealed strip. (5) Fold these strips under the loaf into the seam side. Place loaf seam-side down into a greased baking pan. Grease and cover the surface and let it rise again till it's almost doubled in size. When checking the second rising, press your fingers lightly against the edge of the loaf. The dough should feel light and spongy. It will have lost its elasticity and won't bounce back.

Or, if you prefer, you can shape loaves into rounds and bake them in layer cake pans or on baking sheets. Braided bread is popular but be sure to braid the bread very loosely so that the interwoven effect is not lost as the bread doubles in bulk.

Baking: Bake bread at the temperature specified in the recipe. During the first few minutes of baking, the leavening gas in the dough expands rapidly, giving the bread its greatest volume. So have your oven preheated to the correct temperature before putting the raised loaf in to bake. As bread bakes, the gluten framework is set, the yeast is destroyed which in turn stops the rising action, and the flavor of the bread is fully developed.

After the suggested time for baking has elapsed, test the bread for doneness by tapping the top crust with your finger. (6) When there is a hollow sound, the bread is thoroughly baked and the crust should be nicely browned. If the bread browns too quickly, cover your loaf with foil to prevent the crust from burning. Use the foil cover after the top has browned but the sides are still light. Also if you consistently have problems with crusts browning too quickly, check with an oven thermometer to make sure that your oven temperature is correct.

Remove yeast breads from baking pans immediately after taking them from the oven. This prevents the crust from being "steamed" in the pan. Place bread on a wire rack to cool.

Storage: Wrap cooled breads in foil or clear plastic wrap before storing in a well-ventilated bread box. Do not refrigerate baked yeast breads or rolls: refrigerator temperatures cause breads to stale.

Breads, dinner rolls, and sweet rolls may be frozen satisfactorily up to three months. Glazes, icings, and frostings with powdered sugar don't freeze well. Put the topping on after you thaw the breads or rolls.



Pam uses honey to add natural sweetness to the naturally good rolls.



After the mixer has done its job, Pam stirs in enough additional flour by hand to make a moderately stiff dough.

Pam uses her fingers to spread butter over the rolled out dough.



Roll up the dough, beginning with the outside edge. Place point down, 2 to 3 inches apart, on greased baking sheet.

...e of those 80 became her hus-
d. She read the recipes designed
four, and multiplied by 20.

Pam started bread baking with the
e kind of undauntable enthusi-
s. She and husband, Tim, were
ecting their first child, and like
t college couples had no washer.
earn the money for the machine,
n baked and sold the luscious
ads you see on these pages.

Pam's **Oatmeal Bread** (right) is
le with skim milk, rolled oats,
asses, and unbleached flour
ch she uses in all her breads. The
olesome ingredients make for
d eating as well as good health.

Before putting the loaves into
oven, brush the tops with beaten
yolk and sprinkle some addi-
onal rolled oats atop to give your
illy a hint of the goodness inside.

Whole Wheat Butterhorns (right)
baked with whole wheat flour of
rse, but Pam rolls up something
cial in these golden rolls—
pped filberts. Serve the butter-
horns alongside your favorite soup.

Crusty White Braid (opposite page:
can be sliced if you're the con-
ditional type, but Pam thinks it's
more fun to offer the loaf and
everyone tear off a chunk.

Want something super and some-
g different wrapped up in one?

Sourdough Rye Buns (opposite
e: center). Pam makes her own
rdough starter from yeast, warm
er, honey, and flour, then adds a
le blend of rye and whole wheat
rs. The coarse cracked salt on
makes the buns company special.

Whole Wheat Molasses Bread (op-
ite page: right) may become part
your family's most-wanted list.
re's a lot of crunch in the crust
a lot of goodness in every bite.

Recipes begin on page 104

For more information, page 98

