

How to Bake

Your Complete Reference Book

Volume 1



Flour—the Basic Ingredient
and How to Use it for the Best Baked Goods

Dennis R Weaver & The Prepared Pantry

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[The Prepared Pantry](#)
www.preparedpantry.com
3847 E 38 N
Rigby, ID 83442

1-208-745-7892

Preface

Over 50,000 people downloaded the first edition of *How to Bake*. Thousands wrote telling us how valuable the information wrote. We were overwhelmed—and grateful that we were able to produce something that helped people bake. Baking is a family affair that makes home a little more inviting and builds memories that children carry through their lives. It seemed like we were making a difference.

Then we asked, “What can we do to make *How to Bake* better?” That led to this edition, or rather—series. We concluded that standalone volumes were more valuable and less cumbersome than one giant book. So *How to Bake* is now an eight-volume series.

This new edition has not only been made into a series, it has been updated. The information is more current and reflects our continued learning about the wonderful world of baking. New material has been added. We think you will find this edition more user-friendly and more valuable.

We hope that you enjoy this volume and subsequent volumes and that they become valuable references in your baking.

This book is intended to be printed on your computer at home. Bind the pages in a three-ring binder or other cover and keep this book as a reference in your kitchen. We think you will use it often. Feel free to print extra copies for family and friends. While this is copyright protected material, you may use it for personal, private use and not for commercial purposes.

We invite you to obtain all eight volumes. You can receive them at no cost at <http://www.preparedpantry/how-to-bake-volumes-2-thru-8.htm> We also invite you to use our free library at <http://www.PreparedPantry.com> where you will find more information like this, recipes, and more free downloads. Keep in touch with us with our free newsletters and online magazines. We really want to help you bake.

We wish you the very best

Dennis & Merri Ann Weaver & Company

Rigby, Idaho

Introduction

My mother gave me a cookbook for my eighth birthday. Maybe it was an unusual present for a boy that helped his dad in the garage and milked cows. But it started a love affair with cooking.

I spent many an hour in our old country kitchen. Some of it was just talking with my mother. Much of it was trying to cook something. Sometimes it was helping her. I suspect that much of my philosophy of life was formed in a big square kitchen with a green vinyl floor.

My mother wasn't far removed from her pioneer stock. She had an innovative, make-do attitude. She was basic in her cooking. She had a lot to do and a family to feed and wasn't likely to get too fancy. It carried over into my cooking. We ate foods in season and put food by for winter. On many an afternoon, the counters were lined with peaches or pears in Mason jars, cooling, waiting to be stacked in high brown cabinets the in the closed porch on the back of the house that doubled as a pantry. My mother was neat, orderly, and ambitious. I hope some of my habits mirror hers.

I grew up, went to college, and found my way to Alaska. I worked in a kitchen on the North Slope, an assistant baker, feeding construction hands and roughnecks working in the oil field. Food was king there, the major diversion in a bleak landscape. I baked, washed dishes, and fed steaks to the night crew. I learned professional tricks, techniques that I didn't learn in my mother's square kitchen.

I drifted away to the corporate world. I was fortunate to meet Merri Ann, we married, and had kids. I drifted again, this time to Minnesota and grad school. In Minnesota I found wonderful restaurants and the bakeries of the big cities. I fell in love with the little ethnic shops off the West Bank where you could get fried bananas and chicken mole, where you didn't understand the hurried conversations between the owner and his staff. Life was expanding as was my exposure to foods that I would never see in my little home town.

I was cooking for pleasure, often for relief, and slugging out a career in the city. But I was working long hours in corporate America and not spending enough time with my family. It wasn't the life that we wanted and we revolted to the country, to Idaho and a town of 3,000.

We started The Prepared Pantry—Merri Ann and I and a good, wonderful friend from Minnesota, Cy Laurent. Debbie Frantzen, our married daughter, soon joined us. Her boundless energy, technical abilities, and artistic talents proved invaluable. She's still our webmaster and photographer and she seems to be able to fill in almost anywhere.

No one should underestimate the time and the toil of a business start-up. But we were where we wanted to be and working with food, baking with passion. We spent the first year developing products—baking mixes—baking the same thing over and over and over again until we could do no better. Then we would send them around the country from sea level to 8,700 feet and get others to bake them. Finally we felt like we were

ready to sell them.

Sales always come slowly at first. We advertised and that only helped a little. Then we started a newsletter. We discovered a sea of kindred spirits hungry to learn about baking. We loved our newsletters and judging from the tide of subscribers, had found a vein of people that loved to bake and wanted to learn more. We kept working at our newsletters and got better. The business finally gained momentum and grew rapidly.

A strange thing happened along the way; we discovered that we loved to help people bake. We were no longer in the baking business; we were in the people business. We were now passionate about helping people to bake. We wrote baking guides and watched thousands download them. It didn't matter if they bought. If we helped enough people, they would buy, we believed. We weren't wrong.

Now we get a flood of inquires and emails, sometimes someone with a discovery and we get to share their excitement, sometimes just to say "hi". We struggle to keep up but that's okay. No matter how big we get, we never want to forget—we're in the people business.

Dennis Weaver

How to Bake Series

Other volumes available from The Prepared Pantry

Volume 1

Flour—the Basic Ingredient and How to Use it for the Best Baked Goods

Volume 2

The Wonderful World of Eggs

Volume 3

How to Make Bread and Pastries with Yeast

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Flour—the Basic Ingredient and How to Use it for the Best Baked Goods

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Types of Wheat

To understand baking, you must understand flour. It helps to know a little about wheat, so we'll begin this volume there.

Wheat has three characteristics by which it is classified: its hardness—hard or soft, its color—red or white, and its growing season—winter or spring. These characteristics determine the properties of the wheat and the flour from which it is derived.



Hardness refers to the protein content of the kernel. A hard wheat has a high protein content and the proteins are what forms the gluten in bread dough. In turn, gluten gives bread its chewiness. A flour made from hard wheat is referred to as a strong wheat. Flours made from hard wheat are ideal for bread making. Soft flours--made from soft wheat--are more suitable for cakes, cookies, and muffins where tenderness, not chewiness, is important.

Wheat reflects the climate in which it is grown. The best hard wheats come from rugged climates, places like the windswept plains of the Dakotas, the mountain benches of the Rockies, and semi-arid plains of western Washington. Soft wheat usually comes from mills in warmer climates. The South is famous for its soft wheat the makes tender biscuits and cakes.

We use the best bread flours that we can find. Most come from a mill in Montana owned by General Mills. It's interesting that General Mills publishes two catalogs for commercial flours: Western Flours and Eastern Flours. Our friends in the East sometimes have a difficult time buying really good bread flour. Conversely, in the West, our selection of soft white flours is limited.

Red wheat has a red pigment in the coat of the kernels. This red pigment has a slight bitter taste but red wheat usually is high in protein and makes a wonderfully structured bread. White wheat tends to be sweeter, less bitter, but with less protein. White wheat has a higher mineral content (which is noted in the flour specification as the ash content). Though it has a lower protein content, white wheat is used for bread making, especially for artisan and European-type breads.

Wheat is grown either in the winter or spring. Winter wheat is planted in the fall, it sprouts, grows for a short period, and then becomes dormant through the winter months. In the spring, it begins growing again. Spring wheat is planted in the spring. Spring wheat is usually higher in protein than winter wheat.

In the United States, there are five primary types of wheat grown: hard red winter wheat, hard red spring wheat, soft red winter wheat, hard white wheat, and soft white wheat.

Flour mills produce flour to certain specifications with designated tolerances. They are reliant on the availability of wheat types for stock. The larger producers do a marvelous job of producing flours that meet particular specifications reflecting their access to wheat stocks. Consistency of specification is essential for the commercial bakery and should be important to the home baker.

I grew up in the rural West where hard red winter wheat was common and of pioneer, farmer stock. Home made bread was the norm. Whole wheat bread tended to be full, hearty loaves but slightly bitter. We masked that bitterness with lots of butter and honey or jam. It was not until I understood wheat and flour that I understood where that bitterness came from. Today, I temper that with a flour blend made with some white wheat and a higher ash content. Later in this chapter, we'll tell you how to remove some of that bitterness by soaking the wheat flour.

Components of the Wheat Kernel

There are three major components to the wheat kernel: the bran, the endosperm, and the germ. The bran consists of the protective outer covering, the hull of the kernel. Most of the fiber is in the bran. The germ is the embryonic portion of the kernel and is high in protein, minerals, and sugars. The endosperm is the starchy inner portion that provides the food for the growing germ much as an egg white does in an egg.

In the milling process, the kernels are ground into powder. To make white flour, the powder is sifted to remove most of the bran particles. Whole wheat flour contains bran. (In many operations, the bran is removed and then added back for whole wheat flour.) With the removal of the bran, some flavor and nutritional content is lost. By law, in the United States, white flours must be enriched with vitamins and minerals to approximate the nutritional value of whole wheat flour.

Flour Types

How many different kinds of flour are there? We just opened a commercial flour catalog and counted 28. These were flours that were available from one mill for the Western United States. At last count, we had 16 on hand for our test kitchen.

Matching the flour to the product that you are baking is one of the keys to successful baking. While the commercial baker has access to dozens of specialized flours, we can do quite well with just a few in our kitchens. With those few, you can match the flour to the product you are baking and create your own blends for the effect that you want.



The Role of Gluten

Before we begin to examine types of flour, let's understand gluten. Gluten is made of the proteins found in wheat flour and gives bread its structure, strength, and texture. Without these marvelous little proteins, bread would not be bread. It also explains why it is so hard to make bread from rice, potato, rye, or oat flour and why wheat flour has to be added to these to make bread—only wheat has enough protein to make bread. The gluten makes the bread.

Gluten is developed in the dough when the proteins absorb water and are pulled and stretched in the kneading process. When water is mixed with flour, the protein in the flour absorbs moisture. When dough is worked by mixing or kneading, two types of protein come together into strands—tiny ropes of gluten. As the yeast produces gases in the dough, mostly carbon dioxide, these strands trap the gas bubbles and the dough expands. When we put the bread in the oven, the gluten strands coagulate or solidify much as the protein in eggs solidifies as the egg cooks.

A high protein content is necessary for great bread and a low protein content is required for the tender crumb we love in cakes. During baking, this protein coagulates just as the proteins in an egg coagulate in the heat of a frying pan. It's this coagulated protein that gives bread its chewiness. In a cake, we don't want chewiness so we use a low protein content flour. Furthermore, we use a shortening (commercial shortening, butter, margarine, or oil) to lubricate and shorten the gluten strands. (Hence the descriptive name "shortening".)

You can see how much protein is in flour by comparing ingredient labels. Bread flours will have as much as 14% protein. All-purpose flour is usually in the eight to ten percent range and cake flour is less than that.

A typical bread flour (this one happens to be a General Mills flour) has 12% protein, 75% carbohydrates, one percent fat, less than one percent ash, and 14% moisture. (If exposed to air, the moisture content will change and affect the baker's formulation.)

The White Flours

By far, the western world consumes more white flour than any other. We can buy bleached or unbleached, bread, all-purpose, self-rising, cake, and pastry. We can buy flour made with soft Southern wheat or hard winter wheat. They are all different, each with an intended purpose. The choice of flour will make a profound difference in most baked goods.

Bleached or Unbleached?

Should you use bleached or unbleached flour? Chlorine is the common bleaching agent used to whiten flour (though some millers use benzoyl peroxide). Many store breads use bleached flour to obtain the whiteness that we associate with commercial white bread. While the FDA has approved the use of chlorine in flour, you may prefer to avoid the additives and use flour that has not been bleached.

Chlorine tends to damage the proteins in flour and therefore weaken the gluten structure in bread.

The natural tone of unbleached wheat flour is cream-colored. If you don't mind the ivory or cream color of products made with unbleached flour, by all means use that. The only bleached flour that we use is bleached cake flour when we want to obtain the pure white texture we prefer in white cakes. In yellow cakes or chocolate cakes, we use unbleached pastry flour. If you switch from bleached to unbleached flour in your bread recipes, be aware that the two flours may exhibit different performance characteristics and you may need to make minor changes in the recipe.

Bromated or Unbromated?

In your grocery store, you may find either bromated flour or flour that has not been bromated. Bread flours have to age or oxidize before they perform well. The time and expense of natural oxidation is not practical in commercial operations and the results are not often uniform. So the industry has explored means of speeding the process along and using bromates is one of them. The FDA has ruled bromates to be safe and legal (though California outlawed bromates in 1991 as a possible carcinogen and most of Europe will not allow bromates). If you are not comfortable with bromates, look for flour that has been treated with ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) or other chemicals instead of bromates.

Bread, All-Purpose, Self-Rising, Pastry, or Cake Flour?

Dominant on grocery store shelves are bread flours, all-purpose flours, and cake and pastry flours. Bread flours have a high protein content--10% to 14%--necessary to give bread the chewy texture and open "crumb" appearance that we cherish in our breads. (We'll talk about how protein works in just a moment.) Cake and pastry flours have a low protein content to create the soft, crumbly, melt-in-your-mouth texture that we prefer in our desserts.

All-purpose flour is a compromise between the protein content in bread flours and the protein in pastry flours. All-purpose flours make acceptable bread and pastries but more specialized products are more reliable performers in either spectrum. That's why you will rarely see all-purpose flour in a commercial bakery.

Self-rising flours have salt and leaveners added. Because we cannot control the amount or type of leavener used or the amount of salt in the flour, we rarely use self-rising flour. Some bakers use self-rising flour for their favorite biscuits.

Cake flour is almost always bleached; pastry flours are usually unbleached. Don't hesitate to use unbleached pastry flour for cakes. Unbleached pastry flours make wonderful cakes but white cakes will be ivory, rather than white, in color. Of course, with a yellow or chocolate cake, it will not make a difference.

So what flour should I buy?

Buy flours for their intended uses—bread flour for breads and pastry flours for pastries plus all-purpose flours for gravies and other general uses. Keep in mind that most recipes—except bread recipes--were developed with all-purpose flour since that is what is common in nearly all kitchens. You may wish to use all-purpose flour for a new recipe and then switch to a specialty flour after you become familiar with the recipe.

Comparison of Whole Wheat and White Breads		
(Based on a one ounce slice of each)		
	100% whole wheat	100% white
Calories	70	70
Fat	1.2	1.1
Sodium	181	146
Carbohydrates	12.9	13.9
Protein	2.7	2.4
Dietary Fiber	1.5	0.5
% of US Recommended Daily Allowance		
Protein	4.2	3.7
Vitamin A	trace	trace
Vitamin C	trace	trace
Thiamin	6.7	8.7
Riboflavin	3.5	5.3
Niacin	5.4	6.4
Calcium	2	3.6
Iron	5.5	4.5
Vitamin B-6	2.5	0.5
Pantothenic Acid	2.3	1
Folacin	4	2.5
Phosphorous	7.4	3.1
Magnesium	6.5	1.5
Zinc	3.2	1.2
Copper	5	2

We recommend that you try different brands—there is a surprising difference in performance between brands--and then stick with what works for you. In our experience, name brands tend to consistently hold to a specification where less expensive brands tend to vary from season to season and sometimes, even lot to lot. If you really want to broaden your selection, make friends with a baker since he or she has available a vast array of flours each with its own specification. Buy a bag or two of flour from your baker and try it. Flour is inexpensive and your baker will be able to supply you with a detailed specification so that you can see what you are getting.

Whole Wheat Flour

The wheat kernel is composed of three parts: the bran which forms the hard outer coating of the kernel, the smaller germ which is the embryonic portion of the kernel as the yolk is to an egg, and the starchy endosperm. In the milling of white flour, the bran is cracked from the kernel and discarded and most of the germ is removed leaving the endosperm.

In whole wheat flour, both the bran and the germ are left with the flour. Since the germ has a high fat content and fat can go rancid, whole wheat flours are much more likely to spoil. Also, since the flour is composed of the entire wheat kernel, whole wheat flour is not enriched with vitamin additives as white flour is. (The federal government specifies the addition of vitamins to white flour. See the nutritional comparison of enriched white flour to whole wheat flour in this lesson.) Whole wheat flour can be purchased in either a fine ground or coarse ground texture.

Most but not all of the “brown” breads produced commercially are made from a blend of white bread flour and fine ground whole wheat with about 40% of the flour content being whole wheat. The white flour tempers the whole wheat providing a slightly milder taste without the bitterness that whole wheat sometimes carries. The white flour also creates a stronger gluten structure since bread flour typically has a higher protein content than whole wheat alone. Additionally, the bran in whole wheat has sharp edges that cut gluten strands as it is kneaded.

Graham flour is whole wheat flour. One day in the office we had a stirring debate as to just what graham flour was—a whole wheat flour with extra bran, whole wheat flour from soft wheat, or a more coarsely ground whole wheat. We contacted Technical Services at General Mills. They quoted chapter and verse. FDA’s Code of Federal Regulations allows any whole wheat flour to be called graham flour. So it depends on the miller; read the package carefully to see just what you are getting.

Other Flours

Cornmeal, like wheat flour, can be purchased with or without the germ and in a fine or a coarse ground form. For cornmeal with the germ removed, look for the term “degerminated” on the label. Degerminated cornmeal keeps longer--since the fatty germ is removed--but is not as nutritionally complete as cornmeal with the germ.

The word “meal” refers to products that are not as finely ground as flour. Both cornmeal and corn flour are available. Polenta is usually coarsely ground.



Rye flour is used extensively in pumpernickel and rye breads. It can be purchased in light rye, medium rye, and dark rye flours. White rye is especially prized by the bakers of artisan loaves and creates a mild, uniquely-flavored bread with a taste that is described as being sourdough-like.

Because rye proteins do not form the gluten strands necessary to create structure, bread made with rye flour alone is heavy and dense. Accordingly, when making breads with rye flour, add two to three times as much high protein content bread flour as rye flour. Often extra wheat gluten is added.

The flavor most of us associate with rye bread comes from the caraway seeds in the bread. If your family says they don't like rye bread, make it without the caraway seeds. They will probably find this bread very good. At the end of this lesson, you will find a recipe calling for rye flour and no caraway seeds.

Oats are used in baking in various forms: rolled, quick, steel cut, and flour. (Steel cut oats are quick oats that are not flattened.) Oat bran can also be purchased. Oat products are most generally used with chemically leavened products like scones and muffins. Rolled oats added to yeasted bread make for a wonderful chewy texture and moistness.

Buckwheat flour is often used in pancakes and sometimes in breads. Buckwheat is not really a grain but a seed. Because there are no proteins to form gluten, buckwheat adds little structure to the baked product. It is most commonly used in pancakes but is sometimes added to breads.

Potato flour is an important component in the baker's arsenal. Unlike wheat flour, it is hygroscopic—that is, it attracts water instead of dries out—so that the staling process in breads is retarded or slowed. One tablespoon of potato flour to two cups of wheat flour will extend the life of your bread and keep it moist. We use potato flours extensively in our breads.

Chewy or Tender—How do we Control the Texture

How is it that we can use flour to make both a tender cake and firm chewy French bread? The gluten makes the difference. In a cake, we want little gluten development. In a chewy bread, we want a high percentage of well-developed gluten. We can control this texture in our baked goods by changing four conditions:

1. **Selection of flours:** Cake flours are “weak” or “soft” and have a low protein content, probably around 8%. Bread flours and high-gluten flours are “strong” and usually have a protein content of 12 to 14%.
2. **Amount of shortening:** Any fat is referred to as a shortening because it shortens the gluten strands. It does so by lubricating the fibers so they cannot stick together. The more shortening in the dough, the more tender and less chewy the product will be.
3. **Amount of liquid:** Gluten must have liquid to absorb and expand. If dough does not have enough liquid, the gluten will not fully form and the product will not be tender. That's why we put a minimal amount of water in pie crusts.
4. **Mixing methods:** Generally, the more a batter or dough is mixed, the more the gluten develops. Tender muffins use low-protein flour and are mixed only until the moisture is absorbed while breads are kneaded for a relatively long time.

How Much Does That Flour Weigh?

For consistent results, we always weigh flour. It's very difficult to get consistent weights using a measuring cup. (We've tried by measuring series of ten cups and weighing each. As close as we can get is plus or minus ten percent.) So, we convert the flour called for in a recipe to ounces before beginning.

	Cups	1/4	1/3	1/2	2/3	3/4	1
Bread Flour	Ounces	1.19	1.57	2.30	3.17	3.53	4.75
All Purpose Flour		1.05	1.40	2.13	2.83	3.19	4.25
Cake Flour		1.00	1.32	2.00	2.67	3.00	4.00
Whole Wheat Flour		1.13	1.49	2.25	3.00	3.38	4.50
Rye Flour		1.00	1.32	2.00	2.67	3.00	4.00

Example: If the recipe calls for 1 1/2 cups of bread flour, add 2.33 (1/2 cup) and 4.75 (one cup) to get 7.13 ounces.

The following table can be used for converting cups of flour to ounces of flour so that you can weigh it with your scale. Different flours have different weights for the same volume.

Once you find a flour that works well for you (and a conversion ratio that works), stick with it. While there is some variation in flour from season to season (and from batch to batch), there is less variation than between brands.

Flour Blends

A common way of controlling texture is by blending flours. A baker may wish a little softer flour for a hearth bread or pizza crust and choose to obtain that result by mixing two different flours. Or a baker may choose to make a bread more rustic or with more fiber by adding a whole grain flour to a white flour.

Here are some common blends:

- Whole wheat breads are commonly made with 40% to 60% whole wheat flour with the remaining flour being high protein bread flour. Because whole wheat flour is often lower in protein than high protein bread flours and because the bran in whole wheat flour can damage proteins, many bakers add wheat gluten to the blend to make it more comparable to their favorite bread flours.
- Rye breads are made with a combination of wheat and rye flours and often gluten is added. The rye content should not exceed 40% of the total.
- Hearth breads are often made with a combination of high protein bread flours and all-purpose flour. Though designated with a numerical system not used in the US, most European flours are softer than our high protein bread flours and a flour blend often approximates these European flours.
- Pizzas and calzones are often made with a softer flour to make a more tender crust than those made with bread flour alone. You can create a softer crust by adding all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, or rye flour. We like 10% to 15% rye

flour in our pizza dough. A dark rye makes a more rustic crust while a white rye makes a more refined crust.

- Peasant breads are usually made with blends, blends of high protein bread flour and whole grain flours, either whole grain rye or wheat.
- Cornmeal is commonly added to wheat flour for cornbreads. Occasionally cornmeal is added to flours for peasant breads or Sally Lunn bread.

Other Blend Additives

Conditioners

Dough conditioner (or dough enhancer) is indispensable to the baking of great breads. Use a good, commercial grade conditioner for all of your yeast baking--pastries and breads. It creates an enhanced environment for the growth of yeast helping to make your breads and pastries more uniform and lighter. It also strengthens the gluten structure in the dough to create a better crumb to your loaves. Some dough conditioners also retard staling and help your bread stay fresher longer.

Experiment to find the dough conditioner that works best with your baking. Start with one that is concentrated so that you are adding as little as possible to your recipe. A good dough conditioner will call for as little as one-half teaspoon per loaf.

Potato Flour

Potato flour is used by professional bakers to improve breads and pastries by making them moister and retarding staling. Potato flour is hygroscopic, that is, it attracts moisture rather than drying out and keeps your breads moister longer. Add it to your flour when mixing, about one tablespoon per loaf. More can be added for flavor if you prefer. Though you won't taste it in small amounts, potato flour has a slight, almost sourdough-like flavor in greater concentrations.



The Rising Price of Flour

At the time of this writing (March, 2008), the price of flour at the wholesale level had risen three fold in fourteen months. There are a number of causes. The demand for corn for biofuels is a primary cause. As the demand for corn increased, so did the price. Farmers could make more money planting corn than wheat and switched. With a shortage of wheat, the price skyrocketed.

Biofuel is not the only cause. The falling value of the dollar and droughts in Asia have contributed.

Skyrocketing wheat prices have forced food producers from cereal to bread to pizza to raise their prices. It takes time for price increase to trickle through from the producer to the end user. We believe that prices for wheat and flour will remain high until mid-year and then begin to abate. We also believe that we will never again see flour priced as it was fourteen months ago.

Storing Your Flour

Keep your flour tightly covered so that it neither dries out nor absorbs moisture and store it in a cool location. Some millers state that if tightly covered and in a cool location, white flours will last indefinitely. We prefer to use all white flours within two years.

Because whole wheat still has the fatty germ included, it will not store as well. As with all fats, storage temperature and oxygen greatly affect shelf life. In an airtight container at a cool temperature, whole wheat flours will last a year. Unfortunately, when buying whole wheat flours at the store, we don't know how long those flours have been on the shelf or in a warehouse unless we can find a milling date. Buy from a reputable, high-volume grocer. Consider asking the manager how old his or her whole wheat flours may be.

Recipes: Applying What You Learned

The following recipes were chosen to give you the opportunity to make some very good baked goods while working with different types of flour. You'll work with different wheat flours, rye flour, blends, and cornmeal. These are some of our favorite recipes and think they will become yours also.

Sweet Buttermilk Cornbread

I love cornbread—all kinds of cornbread. I'm always looking for more cornbread ideas and Debbie and Merri Ann are always proclaiming, "No more cornbread recipes." Still you ought to visit our website and check out our cornbread recipes.

This recipe calls for cornmeal soaked overnight in buttermilk and is an excellent opportunity to experiment with different grinds of cornmeal. This is Yankee cornbread, sweetened with honey and brown sugar. We think you will love it.



We classify cornbreads as two types: Rich cornbreads made without flour that use eggs to bind the bread and temper the cornmeal and more bread-like cornbreads with a high flour content. Most of the latter cornbreads have about equal amounts of cornmeal and flour. This recipe belongs in that group. What makes this skillet cornbread recipe different is the overnight soaking of cornmeal to plump the grains of corn.

We invite you to try different grinds of cornmeal in this recipe. We like it with a coarser grind. If you can find some cornmeal with the germ in it, by all means try that.

Sweet Buttermilk Cornbread Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
- 2 cups buttermilk

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon baking powder

3 large eggs
1/2 cup brown sugar
2 tablespoons honey
3 tablespoons melted butter
1 16-ounce whole kernel corn, drained

Directions

1. The night before, mix the cornmeal and buttermilk together in a medium bowl. Let it sit overnight at room temperature.
2. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In another bowl, mix the flour, salt, baking soda, and baking powder together.
3. In a third bowl, whisk the eggs and then add the sugar. Stir until combined and syrupy. Add the honey, melted butter, and corn and mix well.
4. Add the wet mixture to the cornmeal and buttermilk mixture. Add the dry ingredients one-third at a time and mix until moistened. The batter should be pourable like a cake batter. Because different grinds of cornmeal absorb moisture differently and because the drained corn may carry different moisture levels, you may need to adjust the batter slightly with additional milk or flour.
5. On the stovetop, melt two tablespoons of vegetable shortening in an oven-proof 11 to 12-inch skillet until very hot. Pour the batter into the pan. Place the pan in the oven and bake for 35 minutes or until the top is browned and firm and springy. (This is a moist cornbread and needs to be well-cooked.) Cool in the pan.

Texas Chili Corn Bread

I couldn't help myself; I had to include this recipe. I love thick eggy cornbread, cornbread with so many eggs it's almost like an omelet. And I love the flavors of the Southwest. This recipe has it all--chilies, red bell pepper, and garlic but feel free to experiment.

While the first cornbread recipe had a balance of flour and cornmeal, this type of cornbread relies on the eggs and has no flour. It is best as a skillet cornbread.



By the way, there is a free download on the website, "The Wonderful World of Cornbread," with this and a pocketful of cornbread recipes.

Texas Chili Cornbread Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 red bell pepper, chopped and diced
- 1/2 medium sized onion, chopped and diced
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 4-oz can diced green chiles, drained (less if you prefer a less spicy bread)
- 1 cup corn kernels--fresh, frozen, or canned
- 1 1/2 cups grated cheese, cheddar or jack

Directions

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

1. Grease a ten-inch skillet and place it on the middle shelf in the oven.
2. In a large bowl, stir together the cornmeal, baking powder, sugar, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs then stir in the rest of the ingredients, reserving 1/2 cup of the grated cheese.

3. Form a well in the dry ingredients and pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. Mix with a spatula until well combined.
4. Carefully remove the hot pan from the oven and immediately pour the batter into the pan. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top and return to the oven.
5. Let the cornbread bake for 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the pan comes out clean. The top will be a rich, golden brown. Let cool for ten minutes before unmolding.

Make Your Own Corn Bread Mix

Yes, you can make your own mix. It's a great idea for camping this summer with a Dutch oven or for use in the RV. But it's also useful on a busy day. Just one word of caution: cornmeal does not keep as well as flour. Store your mix in a cool, dark place and use within three months.



To make your mix, mix together the following ingredients:

6 cups degerminated cornmeal
6 cups flour, white or wheat
1 1/2 cups dry buttermilk powder
1 cup granulated sugar
1/3 cup baking powder
2 tablespoons baking soda
1 tablespoon salt

Store your mix in an airtight container. If you would like to store it in smaller units, do so in multiples of two cups.

To make your cornbread:

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

You will need:

2 eggs, whisked
3/4 cup water
1/4 cup butter, melted
2 cups mix

1. Mix the eggs, water, and melted butter together.
2. With a spatula, stir the dry mix into the liquids. Stir until just combined. Spoon the batter into ten to twelve well-greased muffin tins or a greased nine-inch pan.
3. Bake the muffins for ten minutes or until done. Bake the cornbread for 23 to 27 minutes or until done. Let the muffins sit in the tins for a few minutes and then remove them to wire racks to cool.

Hints and Tips for Better Cornbread

Cornbread has been nominated the official American Bread and why not? It's original to the Americas. (Corn originated in the New World.) And Americans certainly have a love affair with cornbread with regions adopting favorite types and a world of variations. Whatever your preference, the following tips and techniques will help you build better cornbread.

- Always check your cornmeal for rancidity before baking. Rancid cornmeal will smell stale and musty; good cornmeal will have a sweeter smell.
- When mixing batter for cornbread or muffins, put away your electric mixer. Mixing by hand helps eliminate over mixing. It is desirable to have a few lumps in the batter. They will hydrate during baking and the lumps will help give a craggy appearance to your breads.
- Once moistened, work quickly with the batter. The moisture will activate the leaveners in the batter.
- Cornbread does not keep well. It is best used on the day baked. Store leftovers wrapped in plastic and then aluminum foil and placed in the refrigerator. Cornbread can be frozen for six weeks.
- Use old-process cornmeal instead of degerminated cornmeal when available. Cornmeal with the germ should be stored in the refrigerator for up to six months. If you have more old-process cornmeal than you will use in six months, freeze part of it. It will keep in the freezer for over a year.
- If you are making cornmeal for stuffing, it can be baked up to three days ahead. Crumble it and keep it in an airtight bag. Consider adding sage to cornbread batter.
- Consider substituting whole wheat flour for white flour. With the grainy nature of cornmeal, your kids won't even know that you slipped whole wheat in on them.
- Consider sugar a variable. A sweeter cornmeal will have 1/4 cup sugar or more for every one cup of flour and one cup of cornmeal. Many southern style cornbreads have little or no sugar.
- When making corn muffins (or any muffins), partially fill any empty tins with water. The moisture will improve the muffins, the tins will heat more evenly, and cleanup is easier.
- Many of us love crusty cornbread. A dark pan will make crustier cornbread than a light pan. For the crustiest cornbread, use a skillet.
- Typical recipes call for cornmeal and flour in a one-to-one ratio. Some skillet cornbreads omit the flour and use extra eggs. These cornbreads are not only very good, they are good for you and an option for those who are gluten intolerant.

A note about pans:

One of our customers recently told us that her favorite way to make cornbread is in a [muffin top pan](#). A muffin top pan makes individual servings with a crunchy crust all around. You can do the same thing with a [Swedish plett pan](#) or an [æbleskiver pan](#). Cornbread can also be baked in molds, the most common being a [cast iron pan with molds shaped like ears of corn](#).

European Soft Peasant Bread

Sometimes we take the easy way out. We love hearth breads—the texture, the heft, even how they look. Somewhere along the way, we learned that we can make an easy “mock” hearth bread with a nine-inch pie pan. The pan makes forming the loaf easy and holds the loaf in shape resulting in a taller loaf than if baked on a flat sheet. Because it was easy to do, we even designed our Irish Potato Wheat and White Bread mixes to be baked in pie pans.



European peasant bread is usually made with whole flours, often coarse flours, but they have a goodness and charm about them that make them endearing. The challenge is to work with these flours, to make a bread that is refined enough that it is pleasant to the pallet. This variation gives you a chance to explore whole wheat flours and dark rye flour. In combination, they make a great hearty bread. In this bread, you will soak part of the flour overnight to soften the bran and temper the bread.

This is a whole grain recipe but by soaking some of the flour overnight, the bran is softened and absorbs moisture resulting in a softer bread than many peasant breads. The recipe makes two large loaves.

Baker's notes: *This recipe calls for a soft crust. This bread can properly be made as an artisan bread with a hard, chewy crust. To do so, follow the baking directions for Easy Sourdough Bread which follows.*

This bread can also be made in loaf pans for sandwich breads. Form the loaves and bake the bread at 350 degrees for about 25 minutes or until done.

If you would like to make similar loaves from a mix, you can do so with our Irish Potato Wheat Bread mixes. The Irish Potato Wheat Bread has some white bread flour to temper the whole wheat and give it more structure and is a richer bread with an ample addition of buttermilk.

Ingredients

1 cup whole wheat flour
1 1/2 cup dark rye flour
2 1/3 cups water at room temperature

1 seven gram packet of instant yeast (or two teaspoons)
2 cups graham flour

1/2 tablespoon salt
1/4 cup brown sugar
4 tablespoons melted and slightly cooled butter
2 cups more or less whole wheat flour

coarsely ground whole wheat flour or graham flour for dusting

Directions

1. The night before, mix the one cup of whole wheat flour, the rye flour, and the water together until combined. Cover and let sit at room temperature until the next day.
2. The next day, move the flour and water mixture to the bowl of your stand-type mixer. Add the yeast and combine using the dough hook. Add the graham flour, salt, and sugar. Add the butter on top of the dry ingredients and then begin mixing with your dough hook attachment. Add portions of the two cups whole wheat flour until the dough forms a ball. Continue kneading with the machine, adding more flour as needed to get the right consistency. The dough should be soft when you poke it with your finger. The dough ball should knead for about five minutes at medium speed or until the wheat gluten is well-developed. Remove the dough to a greased bowl, turn once, and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise until doubled.
3. Grease two nine-inch pie pans with shortening and sprinkle them with cornmeal, graham flour, or semolina flour. Set aside. After the dough has risen, divide it in two with a knife. Form a ball by pulling the dough around the center and tucking the seams together on the bottom thus gently stretching the surface of the dough. Pinch the seams together to keep them from opening as the loaf expands. Place the seam side down on the prepared pie pan and repeat with the second loaf. Cover lightly with greased plastic wrap and set aside to rise until doubled. Because these are whole grain loaves with rye flour, it may take longer for them to rise, maybe two hours. Let them rise until they are soft and puffy. While the bread is still rising, preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
4. When the bread has risen, lightly dust the tops of the loaves with graham flour. When the bread has risen and just before placing the loaves in the oven, take a very sharp knife or razor and score the tops by making several quick slashes at a 45 degree angle and not more than 1/4-inch deep. The slashes can be made in a cross or square pattern as shown. (Slashes allow steam to escape without splitting the loaves.) Immediately place the loaves on the center rack of the oven leaving as much room for the air to circulate around the loaves as possible. Bake for 40 minutes or until the bread is done and well browned. If you are using an insta-read thermometer, the bread should register 195 to 200 degrees when done. Remove the loaves from the pans to cool on wire racks. Let the bread cool before slicing.

Easy Sourdough Bread

Sourdough simply uses wild yeast in place of commercial yeast to leaven the bread. It relies on the wild yeasts that are in the air all around us and cultures those yeasts in a warm, wet environment created with water, flour, and sometimes other components.



When creating a sourdough starter, we always felt like we were on an expedition trying to trap invisible yeastie beasties with our flour and water concoctions. Because we couldn't see the beasties, we were never sure what we had captured.

While usually successful, we never felt like we were in control. Maybe that is the way sourdough bread should feel, a symbiosis with nature.

But there is an easier way: use commercial yeast in the starter. I know, that's heresy to the sourdough bread zealot but we only care about the bread. Using commercial yeast is easier, it's the alcohol from the long cool fermentation that creates the sourdough-like flavor, and the wild yeasts will eventually take over the starter anyway. Because it's easy, it's no big deal if you abandon your starter after a few weeks; you can readily start another when you're back in the mood or have the time.

Using this recipe for sourdough bread, a small amount of yeast is used in the starter. As the starter is used and refreshed with new feedings of flour and water, wild yeasts are introduced and cultivated.

Here is the recipe:

For the starter:

1 cup warm water (about 110 degrees)
1/4 teaspoon yeast
1 cup high gluten unbleached flour.

Mix the starter in a glass or steel bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and set it aside at room temperature until it is doubled and bubbly, maybe 4 to 6 hours.

For the sponge:

A sponge is a pre-ferment, a wet mixture of flour and yeast that acts as an incubation chamber to grow yeast at the desired rate. It is added to the dough.

1 cup of the starter
3/4 cup warm water
2 cups flour

Mix the one cup starter with the flour and water, cover, and set aside to ferment until it has tripled in volume. At room temperature, it will take four to eight hours. You can put it in a cool place--about fifty degrees--and let it perk all night. (In the winter, your garage may be just right.) You can also put it in the refrigerator overnight. At temperatures of forty degrees, the yeast will be inactive but the friendly bacteria will still be working and enhance the sour flavor of the bread. If you retard the growth with lower temperatures ("retard" is the correct term for slowing the growth of the yeast), simply bring the sponge to room temperature and let it expand to three times its original volume before proceeding.

For the dough:

All of the sponge
1 1/2 cups flour (more or less)
2 teaspoons salt

Mix the salt with the flour. Knead the combination into the sponge by hand until you have a smooth, elastic, slightly sticky dough, adding more flour as needed. Put the dough in an oiled bowl and let it rise again until doubled, about an hour.

Bakers note: Notice that the salt is not added until the last stage. Salt in the sponge would inhibit yeast growth.

Form the loaves:

Though you can make this bread in pans, it works best as a large freestanding round or oval loaf or two smaller loaves. Place a clean cotton cloth in a bowl or basket in which to hold the loaf. Lightly dust the interior of the bowl with flour. Place each formed loaf upside down in a bowl on top of the dusted flour. Cover the loaves with plastic and let them rise again until doubled. This rising will probably take less than an hour.



Bakers note: You want a light dusting of flour on the cloth to be transferred to the bread, not a heavy caking. Softly sifting flour from a strainer is the easiest way to achieve an even coating.

If you choose to bake the bread in pans, omit this step. Instead, let the dough rise in a greased bowl covered with plastic until doubled. Form the loaves for pans, place the loaves in greased pans, and let rise until well-expanded and puffy. Bake at 350 degrees until done, about 30 minutes.

To bake crusty bread:

To form the thick, chewy crust that is typical of artisan breads, follow these instructions: Place a large, shallow, metal pan in the oven on the lowest shelf. You will pour hot

water in this pan to create steam in the oven. (High heat is hard on pans so don't use one of your better pans and don't use a glass or ceramic pan which might shatter.) An old sheet pan is ideal. Fill a spray bottle with water. You will use this to spray water into the oven to create even more steam.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. When the oven is hot and the bread is fully risen and is soft and puffy--being very careful not to burn yourself with the rising steam and with a mitted hand—turn your head away and pour two or three cups of very hot water in the pan in the oven. Quickly close the oven door to capture the steam. With spray bottle in hand, open the door and quickly spray the oven walls to create more steam and close the door. The oven is now ready for the loaves.

Work quickly to get the bread in the oven before the steam subsides. Gently invert the loaf or loaves onto a slightly greased non-insulated baking sheet on which a little cornmeal has been dusted. With your sharpest knife, quickly make two or three slashes 1/4-inch deep across the top of each loaf. This will vent the steam in the bread and allow the bread to expand properly. Immediately, put the bread in the steamy oven. After a few moments, open the door and spray the walls again to recharge the steam. Do this twice more during the first fifteen minutes of baking. This steamy environment will create the chewy crust prized in artisan breads.

Let the bread bake at 425 degrees for fifteen minutes in the hot steamy oven then reduce the temperature to 375 degrees and bake for a total of 35 to 40 minutes. Check on the bread ten minutes before the baking should be complete. If the top is browning too quickly, tent the loaf with aluminum foil for the remainder of the baking to keep it from burning. The bread is done when the crust turns a dark golden brown and the internal temperature reaches 210 degrees. It is important that the bread is well-baked to drive moisture from the loaf. If the bread is under baked, the excess moisture will migrate to the crust and you will no longer have the dry chewy crust of a great artisan loaf.

This sourdough bread is to die for. The prolonged rising gives the yeast plenty of time to convert the starch to sugars and the friendly bacteria a chance to impart their nut-like flavors.

100% Whole Wheat Bread Recipe

Whole wheat, especially red wheat, often has a bitter aftertaste and bread made entirely from whole wheat flour can be dry and crumbly. This bread is not. It is made with 100% whole wheat flour but it is light and soft. In this recipe, you will refrigerate the dough overnight to give it a long fermentation time. This is an excellent opportunity to get to know whole wheat flours.



The key to really great 100% whole wheat bread is to extract the best flavors from the whole wheat and temper the harsh tones that sometimes accompany whole wheat flour. Good whole wheat bread has an almost nutty taste without that bitter aftertaste. A long fermentation gives the yeast a chance to produce its own flavors and convert the starch to sugar. By refrigerating the dough overnight, you can make excellent 100% whole wheat bread. It's no more work than other recipes; you just mix the dough the day before.

Bakers note: This bread should be very light and fluffy, not dense. The secret of making it so is to make sure that the dough rises fully both in the first rise and in the pans. The dough will fill two 5 x 9-inch loaf pans and should be very soft and puffy before baking. If you let it over-rise, you may see a blister or two in the dough. Poke the blisters with the point of a knife and hurry the bread into the hot oven.

100% Whole Wheat Bread Recipe

Ingredients

5 to 6 cups fine-ground whole wheat flour
1 seven gram packet of instant yeast (or two teaspoons)
2 cups water
1/2 tablespoon salt
1 large egg
1/3 cup brown sugar
4 tablespoons melted and slightly cooled butter

Directions

1. Place about three cups of the flour in the bowl of your stand-type mixer. Add the yeast. Carefully measure 2 cups room temperature (80 degrees) water. The water should feel cool to the touch. Mix the water with the flour with a dough

hook for 30 seconds or until the yeast is dissolved and the ingredients begin to combine.

2. Add the salt, egg, sugar, and butter and continue mixing. Add most of the remaining flour and continue mixing at a medium speed for at least four minutes adding more flour as needed to reach a soft dough consistency. (It is important that the dough be mixed for at least four minutes to develop the gluten.) The dough should clear the sides of the bowl but will be soft, not firm, to the touch.
3. Once the dough is mixed, place it in a large greased bowl, turning once to coat both sides, and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight or for up to three days.
4. On the day that you would like to bake your bread, remove the dough from the refrigerator and let it warm to room temperature--about three hours. The dough should rise to nearly double in size.
5. Once the dough has risen, form the loaves. Coat your hands with flour and gently form a loaf by pulling the dough around itself to create a slightly stretched skin. You may need to coat your hands several times if the dough is sticky. If necessary, pinch the seams together on the bottom of the loaf. Lay the loaf gently in a well-greased loaf pan and cover with plastic wrap. Repeat with the second loaf. Let double again in size, about 1 1/2 hours.
6. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Once the dough has doubled (the loaf should be very puffy), place the two loaves on a shelf in the top half of the oven, well-spaced so that air can circulate between the loaves. Bake for thirty minutes or until done. The interior of the loaves should register at least 185 degrees when an insta-read thermometer is inserted through the bottom crust. Remove the bread from the pans and cool on wire racks. Let it cool completely before cutting.

Tip: How to Convert a White Bread Recipe to a Whole Wheat Bread Recipe

Just because the label says whole wheat doesn't mean that there is no refined flour in the bread. Most whole wheat bread recipes have only 40 to 60 percent whole wheat flour. If you want all whole wheat flour, look for 100% whole wheat.

Most white bread or dinner roll recipes can be converted to partial whole wheat recipes, recipes using 40 to 60 percent whole wheat flour. If you are looking for a 100% whole wheat recipe, don't try to convert a white bread recipe unless you are willing to make substantial changes, especially to the ratio of liquids to flour.

To convert a white bread to a partial whole wheat bread recipe, substitute half—more or less—of the white flour for wheat flour. If the recipe calls for five cups of flour, use 2, 2 1/2, or three cups of whole wheat flour in place of an equal amount of white flour. The whole wheat flour will likely absorb moisture a bit differently than the white so be prepared to make a minor adjustment in the amount of liquid that you use.

The bran in the whole wheat flour will damage some of the gluten in the flour. Whenever making whole wheat bread, use a high-protein content white bread flour or add [wheat gluten](#) to the mixture. A [dough conditioner](#) will help the yeast work and make a lighter, smoother loaf.

You can also convert a bread recipe to soft dinner rolls. Soft dinner rolls are usually a little richer than bread recipes with more sugar and fat than corresponding bread recipes. To convert a bread recipe to dinner rolls, simply add more sweetener and butter or shortening but not to exceed a tablespoon and one-half per cup of flour. Because the butter will add a little moisture to the dough, you may need to compensate with a bit more flour. Reduce the baking time to 15 to 20 minutes. Usually soft dinner rolls are baked at 400 degrees.

California Golden Raisin Muffins

The first time that I made these, I gave some to my neighbors. They went nuts over these muffins—and announced far and wide that these were the best muffins that they had ever had. I don't know about that but they are very good, one of our favorite muffins.



We included these muffins in this section because of the flours. The recipe calls for a blend of all-purpose and whole wheat or rye flours. If you choose rye—without any gluten in the rye flour, you'll have an unbelievably tender muffin. If you use dark rye, you'll have a rustic, fruity muffin. If you choose white rye, it will be a much more refined muffin. (Most of the time, I'll prefer the white.)

The golden raisins, orange, and cinnamon make for a very nice complement of flavors and flavors that seem just right for a sunshiny morning. We use the giant golden raisins that we sell at The Prepared Pantry; they seem milder, sweeter, and plumper than most.

California Golden Raisin Muffin Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup rye flour, all-purpose flour, or whole wheat flour
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel

- 4 tablespoons cold butter

- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup golden raisins

- 1 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Directions

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Grease 1 regular-sized 12-muffin tin.

1. In a large bowl, stir together the flour, brown sugar, salt, baking powder, baking soda, and cinnamon. Stir in the grated orange peel.
2. Use a pastry knife to cut the butter into the dry ingredients and continue cutting until the mixture is coarse and uniform.
3. In another bowl, stir together the orange juice, buttermilk, vanilla extract, and eggs. Form a well in the dry ingredients and pour in the liquid mixture. Add the raisins. Stir to combine. (Do not over-stir. Some lumps are acceptable.) Mix the granulated sugar and cinnamon together and sprinkle on the tops of the muffins.
4. Spoon the batter into muffin tin. Quickly place the muffins in the oven and reduce the heat to 375 degrees. Let bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until the tops are lightly browned and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let the muffins sit for three to five minutes in the pan and then remove them to a rack to cool.

Baker's note: *The initial burst of heat in the hot oven will help the muffins dome. How quickly the muffins bake will depend somewhat on how well your particular oven retains heat.*

Cranberry Nut Orange Muffin Recipe

This recipe evolved from the earlier recipe, the California Golden Raisin Muffin recipe. It too makes a very good muffin . . . and a very attractive muffin. You should make very nicely domed muffins with this recipe. Cranberry and orange is a very nice combination. The nuts make the muffins just right.

Ingredients

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 cup rye flour, all-purpose flour, or whole wheat flour
3 tablespoons brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 tablespoon grated orange peel
4 tablespoons cold butter
1/2 cup orange juice
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 large eggs
1 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup walnut pieces



Directions

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Grease 1 regular-sized 12-muffin tin.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, brown sugar, salt, baking powder, baking soda, and cinnamon. Stir in the grated orange peel.

1. Use a pastry knife to cut the butter into the dry ingredients and continue cutting until the mixture is coarse and uniform.
2. In another bowl, stir together the orange juice, buttermilk, vanilla extract, and eggs. Form a well in the dry ingredients and pour in the liquid mixture. Add the cranberries and nuts. Stir to combine. (Do not over-stir. Some lumps are acceptable.)
3. Spoon the batter into muffin tin. Quickly place the muffins in the oven and reduce the heat to 375 degrees. Let bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until the tops are lightly browned and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Remove to a rack to cool. After five minutes, remove the muffins from the tin to completely cool on a baking rack for cooling.

4. Baker's notes: The initial burst of heat in the hot oven will help the muffins dome. How quickly the muffins bake will depend somewhat on how well your particular oven retains heat.

American Rye Bread Recipe

I'm a sucker for this bread; I like the soft, moist texture and almost sourdough flavor of the white rye flour. It is such a light bread—not dark and heavy like most folks associate with rye-- that it is great with meals or sandwiches.

For a more traditional rye bread, you can add caraway seeds and substitute dark rye flour for the white rye. But we think you'll fall in love with the great light taste of white rye.



Ingredients

2 tablespoons butter, melted
2 cups white rye flour
3 cups high protein bread flour
2 tablespoons wheat gluten
1 seven gram packet instant yeast
2 cups water at 105 degrees
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/2 tablespoon caraway seeds (optional)
1 tablespoon molasses or molasses crystals
2 tablespoons melted butter

Note: In place of the flours and gluten, you can substitute our Hi-Country Rye Flour Blend. If you use this flour blend, your dough will include a dough conditioner that will strengthen the gluten structure and enhance yeast growth.

Directions

1. Melt the butter in the microwave and set it aside to cool. With shortening or butter, grease a large bowl for the dough and 2 large loaf pans (8½ x 4½). If you are going to make hearth loaves, grease a baking sheet and sprinkle it with cornmeal.
2. Measure the flours into a large bowl by whisking the flour so that it not packed and then spooning it into the measure followed by leveling the top with a straightedge. Add the gluten and stir to combine.
3. Put about 1/3 of the flour in the bowl of your stand type mixer equipped with a dough hook. Add the yeast. Add the water at the indicated temperature. With the dough hook, run the machine for thirty seconds to mix the water with the flour to create a slurry. Add the rest of the flour. Add the salt, the optional caraway seeds, the molasses, and the melted butter. Mix at medium speed for about three minutes or until the gluten has formed and the dough is elastic. The dough should be soft but not too sticky. To reach the right consistency, you may need to

dribble a little extra water (maybe one tablespoon) or flour as the dough is kneading. Place the dough in the prepared bowl and cover it to keep the dough from drying while it rises. Let it rise until it doubles.

4. Gently deflate the dough and form two loaves either as free-standing loaves on a baking sheet or sandwich loaves for your bread pans. Cover the loaves and let them rise again until the dough is soft and puffy, about doubled in size.
5. If you are going to make hearth bread with its, chewy, crisp crust, see the direction for baking listed for "EZ Sourdough Bread." If not, preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the bread for about 35 minutes. The time will vary depending on your loaves, the pans, and your oven. The bread should make a hollow sound when thumped on the bottom. The internal temperature of the loaves should be 190 degrees.
6. Remove the loaves from the pans and let them cool on a wire rack. Cool completely, or nearly so, before slicing.

This rye bread is made with white rye and bread flours with the bread flour providing the required gluten. The bread is moist and light and very mild-flavored. For a taste more reminiscent of commercial rye breads, caraway seeds can be added. This is an excellent opportunity to get to know white rye flour.

Deli Rye Bread Recipe

We love dark rye bread though we usually make it without the caraway seeds. This deli-style rye is one of our favorite sandwich breads.

Rye flour does not have the proteins required to make gluten and rye recipes must rely on wheat gluten. You can go up to 50% rye in a recipe by adding wheat gluten but we like to keep the rye percentage less than that. This recipe has only 36% rye and with extra gluten added, can make a light, open bread. It can be made either in loaf pans or free-standing.



Ingredients

- 2 1/2 cups water at 110 degrees
- 1 7-gram packet of instant yeast
- 4 cups high-protein bread flour
- 2 1/4 cups dark rye flour
- 1/4 cup dry buttermilk powder
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/4 cup wheat gluten
- 1 teaspoon conditioner
- 1 tablespoon caraway seeds (optional)

Directions

1. Grease a large bowl for the dough and 2 large loaf pans (9 x 5). If you are going to make hearth loaves, grease a baking sheet and sprinkle it with cornmeal.
2. Measure the flours into a large bowl by whisking the flour so that it not packed and then spooning it into the measure followed by leveling the top with a straightedge. Add the gluten and stir to combine.
3. Put about 1/3 of the flour in the bowl of your stand type mixer equipped with a dough hook. Add the yeast. Add the water at the indicated temperature. With the dough hook, run the machine for thirty seconds to mix the water with the flour to create a slurry. Add the rest of the flour. Add the salt, the optional caraway seeds, the molasses, and the vegetable oil. Mix at medium speed for about three minutes or until the gluten has formed and the dough is elastic. The dough should be soft but not too sticky. To reach the right consistency, you may need to dribble a little extra water (maybe one tablespoon) or flour as the dough is

kneading. Place the dough in the prepared bowl and cover it to keep the dough from drying while it rises. Let it rise until it doubles.

4. Gently deflate the dough and form two loaves either as free-standing loaves on a baking sheet or sandwich loaves for your bread pans. Cover the loaves and let them rise again until the dough is soft and puffy, about doubled in size.
5. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the bread for about 35 minutes. The time will vary depending on your loaves, the pans, and your oven. The bread should make a hollow sound when thumped on the bottom. The internal temperature of the loaves should be 190 degrees.
6. Remove the loaves from the pans and let them cool on a wire rack. Cool completely, or nearly so, before slicing.

Creamy Ricotta and Sausage Calzone Recipe

This recipe will help you learn about blends. Besides, calzones are so good and so much fun to build and explore that we had to make sure that you knew how to build them. Think of them as a pizza in a shell or “hot pockets”. But since the crust is the showcase, not the toppings as in a pizza, it’s important that you have a really good crust. This recipe will help you get that very good crust and the flour blends will help.



Adding white rye flour to your bread flour will make a softer, less chewy yet classic crust. Adding whole grain rye or whole grain wheat will make a more rustic crust.

Use this recipe as a template for other calzones. Try other calzones with mushrooms, pepperoni, spinach, or more. If you use onions or green peppers, partially cook the veggies before adding to the filling. Meats should always be cooked first.

For the crust

2 2/3 cups bread flour
1 cup water at 110 degrees
1 7 gram packet instant yeast
1/4 cup stone ground whole wheat or rye flour
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons granulated sugar
1/2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoons baker’s dry milk
1/2 teaspoon dough conditioner

olive oil

For the filling

3/4 pound mild Italian sausage
1 small onion, diced
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried
1 1/4 to 1 1/2 cups grated mozzarella cheese
1 1/2 to 2 cups whole milk ricotta
2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
salt and pepper (optional)

Directions for the crust

1. Place about 2/3's of the bread flour in the bowl of your stand-type mixer. Add the water and yeast. Mix with the dough hook for about one minute to hydrate the instant yeast.
2. Add the rest of the bread flour, the whole grain flour, olive oil, the sugar, salt, dry milk, and dough conditioner. Mix for about four minutes at medium speed or until the gluten is formed.
3. Remove the dough to a large greased bowl. Cover and let the dough rise until doubled.

For the filling

1. Sauté the sausage and onion together until cooked but not over-cooked. (The meat will cook just a bit more in the heat of the oven.) Stir in the basil. Crumble the meat into smaller pieces.

Putting the calzone together

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

1. Once the dough has risen, divide it into three equal parts with a sharp knife. Roll out each into a nine-inch round. Avoid any thin spots that might leak.
2. Place 1/3 of the mozzarella on the lower half of each circle. On top of the cheese, place 1/3 of the meat and onion filling. On top of the filling, add 1/3 of the ricotta. Sprinkle each with a portion of the parmesan. Salt and pepper if desired.
3. Fold the top of the calzone crust over the bottom into the traditional half-moon shape. Seal the edges by crimping them with a fork. Use a sharp knife or pizza wheel to trim the crimped edges smoothly.
4. Grease a large baking sheet and dust it with cornmeal or semolina flour. With a pastry brush, brush the crust of each of the calzones with olive oil. Bake the calzones for 15 to 20 minutes or until browned. Remove from the oven and turn to a wire rack. Brush the crust again with olive oil. Serve hot.

Baker's Notes: *In filling the calzones, you don't need to measure the ingredients; just use what looks right. Unless your sausage is well-seasoned, you will probably want to sprinkle the fillings with salt and pepper.*

How to Make Pitas

We admit—we like to impress people. It's fun to see peoples' faces when they see these pitas: "How did they do that?"

Make these for a Saturday afternoon get-together. Your friends will have no clue how you made these puffy little bread pockets. You can tell them if you want—it's the water in the dough turning to steam in the hot oven that makes the pitas puffy—or you can just let them think that you're magic.



Just as homemade bread is much better than store bread, so are homemade pitas better. And they are really quite easy to make. Once your family has had fresh homemade pitas, you'll never get by with store pitas again.

Homemade pitas are easy to make with just a few ingredients and basic kitchen equipment. To make your pitas, you will need a mister, a rolling pan, and a heavy baking sheet or baking stone.

Homemade Pita Recipe

Ingredients

2 3/4 cups bread flour
1 7-gram packet of instant yeast
1 1/4 cups warm (105 degree) water
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup stone ground whole wheat flour
2 teaspoons salt

Directions

1. With your stand type mixer, combine about 2/3's of the white flour, the yeast, and the warm water. Mix with a dough hook for about 30 seconds. (This mixes in and hydrates the yeast.) Add the rest of the flour, the whole wheat flour, and then the olive oil and salt. Knead with the dough hook for about four minutes on medium speed or until the gluten is formed. Add a little more flour or water if needed to get the right consistency. The dough should be a little wetter than bread dough.
2. Remove the dough to a greased bowl and let sit for about an hour or until the dough has doubled in size and is puffy.
3. Place a rack on the lowest shelf in the oven and remove the second rack so that you can reach into the oven with the formed pitas. Place a heavy cooking sheet or baking stone on the rack. Preheat the oven to 475 degrees.

4. Form the dough into 2-inch balls. With a rolling pin, roll the balls flat to a thickness of about 3/8 inch. Let these discs sit on the counter uncovered for ten to fifteen minutes.
5. Spray the disks with water from a mister, so that the tops are just damp. Fold the dough over to trap the moisture and roll out to 3/8 inch thick again. If the disks are out-of-round, that's okay. Let them rest for ten minutes.
6. Place two or three of the flat disks on the hot baking sheet in the oven. Bake for 3 1/2 to 4 minutes. The pitas should be puffy but not browned. Remove the pitas from the oven and let them cool on a wire rack.
7. Let the oven heat recover for five minutes and bake the next two or three pitas. Continue until all are baked.

Baker's notes: *If your pitas do not puff, there is not enough moisture trapped in the dough. They will still taste good and you can split them with the end of knife but they will not have that puffy, hollow interior.*

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