

Basic bread

Season: All

Type: Basic & breads

Difficulty: Intermediate

Serves: makes one loaf

Basic bread is delicious, and not difficult to make at all. Students will enjoy the kneading and shaping of the loaves. This recipe does need time for two risings, but you can get around that by asking each class to prepare the dough for the following class. Then, they shape and bake the dough prepared for them by the previous class. (You will have to make the first batch.)

Equipment:

kitchen scales
measuring spoons
2 large mixing bowls
scissors
1 medium mixing jug, big enough for 500mL at least
wooden spoon
pastry brush
large board or flat, clean surface for kneading dough
clean tea towel
a spoon
loaf tin or baking tray

Ingredients:

400 g plain flour
100 g whole-wheat flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 sachet (7 g) instant dry yeast
500 mL warm water
1 tablespoon honey (can substitute with molasses)
vegetable oil, for oiling bowl and tin
semolina or fine polenta – a spoonful for dusting

What to do:

- Tip all the flour into a large mixing bowl and add the salt and yeast. Stir once or twice with the wooden spoon.
- Measure 500 mL of warm water into the measuring jug and stir in the honey until it dissolves.
- Using the wooden spoon, push the flour away from the centre of the large bowl to make a well in the middle. Pour in the warm water and honey mixture.
- Stir to mix the flour and water to a heavy dough. It will form a sticky ball.
- Sprinkle flour on the wooden board or clean, dry surface, pat some flour onto your hands and sprinkle some flour on the dough in the bowl.
- Tip out the dough and pat all the pieces into a pile. Squash it down, using your hands to gather it all together into one lump.
- Now push the dough down with the heels of your hands, then roll and fold the dough into a ball and squash it down again. This is called kneading.
- If the dough feels sticky, pat your hands and sprinkle the dough and board with more flour, just a little at a time.

- Knead, counting each time you squash the dough. You want to count to 200 squashes. (Or watch the clock and knead for 3 minutes.) Roll it back into a ball between each one. You will feel the dough becoming warmer, less sticky and more stretchy.
- Dip the pastry brush into a little vegetable oil and use it to oil the inside of the second large bowl. Drop your dough into the oiled bowl.
- Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave it for at least 30 minutes in a comfortably warm place (not too hot).
- Preheat the oven to 200°C.
- Brush the inside of the loaf tin with the pastry brush to oil it.
- Tip in about a spoonful of semolina flour or polenta, then tilt the loaf tin in every direction gently so that the semolina sticks to the oiled surface all over the inside of the tin. Tap the tin on the board to get rid of any extra semolina.
- Sprinkle your surface with flour.
- You know the dough is ready to work again when it is puffy and about twice the size it was before. Make a fist and punch straight down once into the dough. All the air will escape.
- Tip your dough onto the floured board and knead again. This time you only need to count 30 squashes (30 seconds).
- When you have finished kneading your bread, pat it into a long round shape and drop it in the tin. Cover the tin with a clean tea towel and leave it in the warm place again for 20 minutes. You should then see that the bread dough has risen.
- Place the tin in the middle of the oven and bake for 40 minutes.
- Wearing oven mitts on both hands, carefully take the tin out of the oven, turn it over and tip the bread out onto your hand.
- Tap the bottom of the loaf with a finger and listen carefully. The sound will be a hollow 'tonk' like a muffled drum. Listen to the loaf itself: if you can hear lots of tiny bubbles popping, put it carefully back in the tin and back in the oven for 5 more minutes. If it sounds ready, place the loaf (without the tin) on a wire rack to cool.
- Wait at least 10 minutes before slicing and serving warm.

